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MARY BARTON:

A

TALE OF MANCHESTER LIFE.

"'How knowest thou,' may the distressed Novel-wright exclaim, 'that I, here where I sit, am the Foolishest of existing mortals; that this my Long-ear of a fictitious Biography shall not find one and the other, into whose still longer ears it may be the means, under Providence, of instilling somewhat?' We answer, 'None knows, none can certainly know: therefore, write on, worthy Brother, even as thou canst, even as it is given thee.'"

CARLYLE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

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MARY BARTON:

A TALE OF MANCHESTER LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

"But in his pulse there was no throb,
Nor on his lips one dying sob;
Sigh, nor word, nor struggling breath
Heralded his way to death."

SIEGE OF CORINTH.

"My brain runs this way and that way; 'twill not fix
On aught but vengeance."

DUKE OF GUISE.

I MUST now go back to an hour or two before Mary, and her friends, parted for the night. It might be about eight o'clock that evening, and the three Miss Carsons were sitting in their father's drawing-room. He was asleep in the dining-room, in his own comfortable chair. Mrs. Carson was (as was usual with her, when no particular excitement was going on), very poorly, and sitting up-stairs in her dressing-room, indulging in the luxury of a head-ache. She was not well, certainly. "Wind in the head," the servants

called it. But it was but the natural consequence of the state of mental and bodily idleness in which she was placed. Without education enough to value the resources of wealth and leisure, she was so circumstanced as to command both. It would have done her more good than all the æther and sal-volatile she was daily in the habit of swallowing, if she might have taken the work of one of her own housemaids for a week; made beds, rubbed tables, shaken carpets, and gone out into the fresh morning air, without all the paraphernalia of shawl, cloak, boa, fur boots, bonnet, and veil, in which she was equipped before setting out for an "airing," in the closely shut-up carriage.

So the three girls were by themselves in the comfortable, elegant, well-lighted, drawing-room; and, like many similarly-situated young ladies, they did not exactly know what to do to while away the time until the tea-hour. The elder two had been at a dancing-party the night before, and were listless and sleepy in consequence. One tried to read "Emerson's Essays," and fell asleep in the attempt; the other was turning over a parcel of new music, in order to select what she liked. Amy, the youngest, was copying some manuscript music. The air was heavy with the fragrance of strongly-scented flowers, which sent out their night odours from an adjoining conservatory.

The clock on the chimney-piece chimed eight. Sophy, (the sleeping sister) started up at the sound.

"What o'clock is that?" she asked.

"Eight," said Amy.

"Oh, dear! how tired I am! Is Harry come in? Tea would rouse one up a little. Are not you worn out, Helen?"

"Yes; I am tired enough. One is good for nothing the day after a dance. Yet I don't feel weary at the time; I suppose it is the lateness of the hours."

"And yet, how could it be managed otherwise? So many don't dine till five or six, that one cannot begin before eight or nine; and then it takes a long time to get into the spirit of the evening. It is always more pleasant after supper than before."

"Well, I'm too tired to-night to reform the world in the matter of dances, or balls. What are you copying, Amy?"

"Only that little Spanish air you sing—'Quien quiera.'"

"What are you copying it for?" asked Ellen.

"Harry asked me to do it for him, this morning at breakfast-time,—for Miss Richardson, he said."

"For Jane Richardson!" said Sophy, as if a new idea were receiving strength in her mind.

"Do you think Harry means any thing by his attention to her?" asked Helen.

"Nay, I do not know any thing more than you do; I can only observe and conjecture. What do you think, Helen?"

"Harry always likes to be of consequence to the belle of the room. If one girl is more admired than another, he likes to flutter about her, and seem to be on intimate terms with her. That is his way, and I have

not noticed any thing beyond that in his manner to Jane Richardson."

"But I don't think she knows it's only his way. Just watch her the next time we meet her when Harry is there, and see how she crimsons, and looks another way when she feels he is coming up to her. I think he sees it, too, and I think he is pleased with it."

"I dare say Harry would like well enough to turn the head of such a lovely girl as Jane Richardson. But I'm not convinced that he is in love, whatever she may be."

"Well, then!" said Sophy, indignantly, "though it is our own brother, I do think he is behaving very wrongly. The more I think of it the more sure I am that she thinks he means something, and that he intends her to think so. And then, when he leaves off paying her attention—"

"Which will be as soon as a prettier girl makes her appearance," interrupted Helen.

"As soon as he leaves off paying her attention," resumed Sophy, "she will have many and many a heart-ache, and then she will harden herself into being a flirt, a feminine flirt, as he is a masculine flirt. Poor girl!"

"I don't like to hear you speak so of Harry," said Amy, looking up at Sophy.

"And I don't like to have to speak so, Amy, for I love him dearly. He is a good, kind brother, but I do think him vain, and I think he hardly knows the misery, the crimes to which indulged vanity may lead him."

Helen yawned.

" Oh! do you think we may ring for tea. Sleeping after dinner always makes me so feverish."

" Yes, surely. Why should not we?" said the more energetic Sophy, pulling the bell with some determination.

" Tea directly, Parker," said she, authoritatively, as the man entered the room.

She was too little in the habit of reading expressions on the faces of others to notice Parker's countenance.

Yet it was striking. It was blanched to a dead whiteness; the lips compressed as if to keep within some tale of horror; the eyes distended and unnatural. It was a terror-stricken face.

The girls began to put away their music and books, in preparation for tea. The door slowly opened again, and this time it was the nurse who entered. I call her nurse, for such had been her office in by-gone days, though now she held rather an anomalous situation in the family. Seamstress, attendant on the young ladies, keeper of the stores; only " Nurse" was still her name. She had lived longer with them than any other servant, and to her their manner was far less haughty than to the other domestics. She occasionally came into the drawing-room to look for things belonging to their father or mother, so it did not excite any surprise when she advanced into the room. They went on arranging their various articles of employment.

She wanted them to look up. She wanted them to read something in her face—her face so full of woe,

of horror. But they went on without taking any notice. She coughed; not a natural cough; but one of those coughs which ask so plainly for remark.

"Dear nurse, what is the matter?" asked Amy. "Are not you well?"

"Is mamma ill?" asked Sophy, quickly.

"Speak, speak, nurse!" said they all, as they saw her efforts to articulate, choked by the convulsive rising in her throat. They clustered round her with eager faces, catching a glimpse of some terrible truth to be revealed.

"My dear young ladies! my dear girls," she gasped out at length, and then she burst into tears.

"Oh! do tell us what it is, nurse," said one. "Any thing is better than this. Speak!"

"My children! I don't know how to break it to you. My dears, poor Mr. Harry is brought home——"

"Brought home—*brought* home—how?" Instinctively they sank their voices to a whisper; but a fearful whisper it was. In the same low tone, as if afraid lest the walls, the furniture, the inanimate things which told of preparation for life and comfort, should hear, she answered,

"Dead!"

Amy clutched her nurse's arm, and fixed her eyes on her as if to know if such a tale could be true; and when she read its confirmation in those sad, mournful, unflinching eyes, she sank without word, or sound, down in a faint upon the floor. One sister sat down on an ottoman, and covered her face, to try and realise it.

That was Sophy. Helen threw herself on the sofa, and burying her head in the pillows, tried to stifle the screams and moans which shook her frame.

The nurse stood silent. She had not told *all.*

"Tell me," said Sophy, looking up, and speaking in a hoarse voice, which told of the inward pain, "tell me, nurse! Is he *dead*, did you say? Have you sent for a doctor? Oh! send for one, send for one," continued she, her voice rising to shrillness, and starting to her feet. Helen lifted herself up, and looked, with breathless waiting, towards nurse.

"My dears, he is dead! But I have sent for a doctor. I have done all I could."

"When did he—when did they bring him home?" asked Sophy.

"Perhaps ten minutes ago. Before you rang for Pearson."

"How did he die? Where did they find him? He looked so well. He always seemed so strong. Oh! are you sure he is dead?"

She went towards the door. Nurse laid her hand on her arm.

"Miss Sophy, I have not told you all. Can you bear to hear it? Remember, master is in the next room, and he knows nothing yet. Come, you must help me to tell him. Now be quiet, dear! It was no common death he died!" She looked in her face as if trying to convey her meaning by her eyes.

Sophy's lips moved, but nurse could hear no sound.

"He has been shot as he was coming home along Turner Street, to-night."

Sophy went on with the motion of her lips, twitching them almost convulsively.

"My dear, you must rouse yourself, and remember your father and mother have yet to be told. Speak! Miss Sophy."

But she could not; her whole face worked involuntarily. The nurse left the room, and almost immediately brought back some sal-volatile and water. Sophy drank it eagerly, and gave one or two deep gasps. Then she spoke in a calm unnatural voice.

"What do you want me to do, nurse? Go to Helen, and poor Amy. See, they want help."

"Poor creatures! we must let them alone for a bit. You must go to master; that's what I want you to do, Miss Sophy. You must break it to him, poor old gentleman. Come, he's asleep in the dining-room, and the men are waiting to speak to him."

Sophy went mechanically to the dining-room door.

"Oh! I cannot go in. I cannot tell him. What must I say?"

"I'll come with you, Miss Sophy. Break it to him by degrees."

"I can't, nurse. My head throbs so, I shall be sure to say the wrong thing."

However, she opened the door. There sat her father, the shaded light of the candle-lamp falling upon, and softening his marked features, while his snowy hair contrasted well with the deep crimson morocco of the

chair. The newspaper he had been reading had dropped on the carpet by his side. He breathed regularly and deeply.

At that instant the words of Mrs. Heman's song came full into Sophy's mind.

> "Ye know not what ye do,
> That call the slumberer back
> From the realms unseen by you,
> To life's dim, weary track."

But this life's track would be to the bereaved father something more than dim and weary, hereafter.

"Papa," said she, softly. He did not stir.

"Papa!" she exclaimed, somewhat louder.

He started up, half awake.

"Tea is ready, is it?" and he yawned.

"No! papa, but something very dreadful—very sad has happened!"

He was gaping so loud that he did not catch the words she uttered, and did not see the expression of her face.

"Master Henry is not come back," said nurse. Her voice, heard in unusual speech to him, arrested his attention, and rubbing his eyes, he looked at the servant.

"Harry! oh no! he had to attend a meeting of the masters about these cursed turn-outs. I don't expect him yet. What are you looking at me so strangely for, Sophy?"

"Oh, papa, Harry is come back," said she, bursting into tears.

"What do you mean?" said he, startled into an impatient consciousness that something was wrong. "One of you says he is not come home, and the other says he is. Now that's nonsense! Tell me at once what's the matter. Did he go on horseback to town? Is he thrown? Speak, child, can't you?"

"No! he's not been thrown, papa," said Sophy, sadly.

"But he's badly hurt," put in the nurse, desirous to be drawing his anxiety to a point.

"Hurt? Where? How? Have you sent for a doctor?" said he, hastily rising, as if to leave the room.

"Yes, papa, we've sent for a doctor—but I'm afraid —I believe it's of no use."

He looked at her for a moment, and in her face he read the truth. His son, his only son was dead.

He sank back in his chair, and hid his face in his hands, and bowed his head upon the table. The strong mahogany dining-table, shook and rattled under his agony.

Sophy went and put her arms round his bowed neck.

"Go! you are not Harry," said he; but the action roused him.

"Where is he? where is the—" said he, with his strong face set into the lines of anguish, by two minutes of such intense woe.

"In the servants' hall," said nurse. "Two policemen and another man brought him home. They

would be glad to speak to you when you are able, sir."

"I am able now," replied he. At first when he stood up, he tottered. But steadying himself, he walked, as firmly as a soldier on drill, to the door. Then he turned back and poured out a glass of wine from the decanter which yet remained on the table. His eye caught the wine-glass which Harry had used but two or three hours before. He sighed a long quivering sigh. And then mastering himself again, he left the room.

"You had better go back to your sisters, Miss Sophy," said nurse.

Miss Carson went. She could not face death yet.

The nurse followed Mr. Carson to the servants' hall. There, on their dinner-table, lay the poor dead body. The men who had brought it, were sitting near the fire, while several of the servants stood round the table, gazing at the remains.

The remains!

One or two were crying; one or two were whispering; awed into a strange stillness of voice and action by the presence of the dead. When Mr. Carson came in they all drew back, and looked at him with the reverence due to sorrow.

He went forward and gazed long and fondly on the calm, dead face; then he bent down and kissed the lips yet crimson with life. The policemen had advanced and stood ready to be questioned. But at first the old man's mind could only take in the idea of death; slowly,

slowly came the conception of violence, of murder. "How did he die?" he groaned forth.

The policemen looked at each other. Then one began, and stated that having heard the report of a gun in Turner Street, he had turned down that way (a lonely, unfrequented way Mr. Carson knew, but a short cut to his garden-door, of which Harry had a key); that as he (the policeman) came nearer, he had heard footsteps as of a man running away; but the evening was so dark (the moon not having yet risen) that he could see no one twenty yards off. That he had even been startled when close to the body, by seeing it lying across the path at his feet. That he had sprung his rattle; and when another policeman came up, by the light of the lantern they had discovered who it was that had been killed. That they believed him to be dead when they first took him up, as he had never moved, spoken, or breathed. That intelligence of the murder had been sent to the superintendent, who would probably soon be here. That two or three policemen were still about the place where the murder was committed, seeking out for some trace of the murderer. Having said this, they stopped speaking.

Mr. Carson had listened attentively, never taking his eyes off the dead body. When they had ended, he said,

"Where was he shot?"

They lifted up some of the thick chestnut curls, and showed a blue spot (you could hardly call it a hole, the flesh had closed so much over it) in the left

temple. A deadly aim! And yet it was so dark a night!

"He must have been close upon him," said one policeman.

"And have had him between him and the sky," added the other.

There was a little commotion at the door of the room, and there stood poor Mrs. Carson, the mother.

She had heard unusual noises in the house, and had sent down her maid (much more a companion to her than her highly-educated daughters) to discover what was going on. But the maid either forgot, or dreaded, to return; and with nervous impatience Mrs. Carson came down herself, and had traced the hum and buzz of voices to the servants' hall.

Mr. Carson turned round. But he could not leave the dead for any one living.

"Take her away, nurse. It is no sight for her. Tell Miss Sophy to go to her mother." His eyes were again fixed on the dead face of his son.

Presently Mrs. Carson's hysterical cries were heard all over the house. Her husband shuddered at the outward expression of the agony which was rending his heart.

Then the police superintendent came, and after him the doctor. The latter went through all the forms of ascertaining death, without uttering a word, and when at the conclusion of the operation of opening a vein, from which no blood flowed, he shook his head, all

present understood the confirmation of their previous belief. The superintendent asked to speak to Mr. Carson in private.

"It was just what I was going to request of you," answered he, so he led the way into the dining-room, with the wine-glass still on the table.

The door was carefully shut, and both sat down, each apparently waiting for the other to begin.

At last Mr. Carson spoke.

"You probably have heard that I am a rich man."

The superintendent bowed in assent.

"Well, sir, half—nay, if necessary, the whole of my fortune I will give to have the murderer brought to the gallows."

"Every exertion, you may be sure, sir, shall be used on our part; but probably offering a handsome reward might accelerate the discovery of the murderer. But what I wanted particularly to tell you, sir, is that one of my men has already got some clue, and that another (who accompanied me here) has within this quarter of an hour found a gun in the field which the murderer crossed, and which he probably threw away when pursued, as encumbering his flight. I have not the smallest doubt of discovering the murderer."

"What do you call a handsome reward," said Mr. Carson.

"Well, sir, three, or five hundred pounds is a munificent reward: more than will probably be required as a temptation to any accomplice."

"Make it a thousand," said Mr. Carson, decisively. "It's the doing of those damned turn-outs."

"I imagine not," said the superintendent. "Some days ago the man I was naming to you before, repeated to the inspector when he came on his beat, that he had had to separate your son from a young man, who by his dress he believed to be employed in a foundry; that the man had thrown Mr. Carson down, and seemed inclined to proceed to more violence, when the policeman came up, and interfered. Indeed, my man wished to give him in charge for an assault, but Mr. Carson would not allow that to be done."

"Just like him!—noble fellow!" murmured the father.

"But after your son had left, the man made use of some pretty strong threats. And it's rather a curious coincidence that this scuffle took place in the very same spot where the murder was committed; in Turner Street."

There was some one knocking at the door of the room. It was Sophy, who beckoned her father out, and then asked him, in an awe-struck whisper, to come up-stairs and speak to her mother.

"She will not leave Harry, and talks so strangely. Indeed—indeed—papa, I think she has lost her senses."

And the poor girl sobbed bitterly.

"Where is she?" asked Mr. Carson.

"In his room."

They went up stairs rapidly, and silently. It was a large, comfortable bedroom; too large to be well lighted

by the flaring, flickering kitchen-candle which had been hastily snatched up, and now stood on the dressing-table.

On the bed, surrounded by its heavy, pall-like green curtains, lay the dead son. They had carried him up, and laid him down, as tenderly as though they feared to waken him; and, indeed, it looked more like sleep than death, so very calm and full of repose was the face. You saw, too, the chiselled beauty of the features much more perfectly than when the brilliant colouring of life had distracted your attention. There was a peace about him, that told death had come too instantaneously to give any previous pain.

In a chair, at the head of the bed, sat the mother,—smiling. She held one of the hands (rapidly stiffening, even in her warm grasp), and gently stroked the back of it, with the endearing caress she had used to all her children when young.

"I am glad you are come," said she, looking up at her husband, and still smiling. "Harry is so full of fun, he always has something new to amuse us with; and now he pretends he is asleep, and that we can't waken him. Look! he is smiling now, he hears I have found him out. Look!"

And, in truth, the lips, in the rest of death, did look as though they wore a smile, and the waving light of the unsnuffed candle almost made them seem to move.

"Look, Amy," said she, to her youngest child, who knelt at her feet, trying to soothe her, by kissing her garments.

"Oh, he was always a rogue! You remember, don't you, love? how full of play he was as a baby; hiding his face under my arm, when you wanted to play with him. Always a rogue, Harry!"

"We must get her away, sir," said nurse; "you know there is much to be done, before—"

"I understand, nurse," said the father, hastily interrupting her in dread of the distinct words which would tell of the changes of mortality.

"Come, love," said he to his wife. "I want you to come with me. I want to speak to you down-stairs."

"I'm coming," said she, rising; "perhaps, after all, nurse, he's really tired, and would be glad to sleep. Don't let him get cold, though,—he feels rather chilly," continued she, after she had bent down, and kissed the pale lips.

Her husband put his arm round her waist, and they left the room. Then the three sisters burst into unrestrained wailings. They were startled into the reality of life and death. And yet, in the midst of shrieks, and moans, of shivering, and chattering of teeth, Sophy's eye caught the calm beauty of the dead; so calm amidst such violence, and she hushed her emotion.

"Come," said she to her sisters, "nurse wants us to go; and, besides, we ought to be with mamma. Papa told the man he was talking to, when I went for him, to wait, and she must not be left."

Meanwhile, the superintendent had taken a candle, and was examining the engravings that hung round the

dining-room. It was so common to him to be acquainted with crime, that he was far from feeling all his interest absorbed in the present case of violence, although he could not help having much anxiety to detect the murderer. He was busy looking at the only oil-painting in the room (a youth of eighteen or so, in a fancy dress), and conjecturing its identity with the young man so mysteriously dead ; when the door opened, and Mr. Carson returned. Stern as he had looked before leaving the room, he looked far sterner now. His face was hardened into deep-purposed wrath.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for leaving you." The superintendent bowed. They sat down, and spoke long together. One by one the policemen were called in, and questioned.

All through the night there was bustle and commotion in the house. Nobody thought of going to bed. It seemed strange to Sophy to hear nurse summoned from her mother's side to supper, in the middle of the night, and still stranger that she could go. The necessity of eating and drinking seemed out of place in the house of death.

When night was passing into morning, the dining-room door opened, and two persons' steps were heard along the hall. The superintendent was leaving at last. Mr. Carson stood on the front door-step, feeling the refreshment of the caller morning air, and seeing the starlight fade away into dawn.

"You will not forget," said he. "I trust to you."

The policeman bowed.

"Spare no money. The only purpose for which I now value wealth is to have the murderer arrested, and brought to justice. My hope in life now is to see him sentenced to death. Offer any rewards. Name a thousand pounds in the placards. Come to me at any hour, night or day, if that be required. All I ask of you, is, to get the murderer hanged. Next week, if possible—to-day is Friday. Surely, with the clues you already possess, you can muster up evidence sufficient to have him tried next week."

"He may easily request an adjournment of his trial, on the ground of the shortness of the notice," said the superintendent.

"Oppose it, if possible. I will see that the first lawyers are employed. I shall know no rest while he lives."

"Every thing shall be done, sir."

"You will arrange with the coroner. Ten o'clock, if convenient."

The superintendent took leave.

Mr. Carson stood on the step, dreading to shut out the light and air, and return into the haunted, gloomy house.

"My son! my son!" he said, at last. "But you shall be avenged, my poor, murdered boy."

Ay! to avenge his wrongs the murderer had singled out his victim, and with one fell action, taken away the life that God had given, To avenge his child's death, the old man lived on; with the single purpose

in his heart, of vengeance on the murderer. True, his vengeance was sanctioned by law, but was it the less revenge?

Are we worshippers of Christ? or of Alecto?

Oh! Orestes! you would have made a very tolerable Christian of the nineteenth century!

CHAPTER II.

"Deeds to be hid which were not hid,
Which, all confused, I could not know,
Whether I suffered or I did,
For all seemed guilt, remorse, or woe."

COLERIDGE.

I LEFT Mary, on that same Thursday night which left its burden of woe at Mr. Carson's threshold, haunted with depressing thoughts. All through the night she tossed restlessly about; trying to get quit of the ideas that harassed her, and longing for the light when she could rise, and find some employment. But just as dawn began to appear, she became more quiet, and fell into a sound heavy sleep, which lasted till she was sure it was late in the morning by the full light that shone in.

She dressed hastily, and heard the neighbouring church-clock strike eight. It was far too late to do as she had planned (after inquiring how Alice was, to return and tell Margaret), and she accordingly went in to inform the latter of her change of purpose, and the cause of it; but on entering the house she found

Job sitting alone, looking sad enough. She told him what she came for.

"Margaret, wench! why she's been gone to Wilson's these two hours. Ay! sure, you did say last night you would go; but she could na rest in her bed, so was off betimes this morning."

Mary could do nothing but feel guilty of her long morning nap, and hasten to follow Margaret's steps; for late as it was, she felt she could not settle well to her work, unless she learnt how kind good Alice Wilson was going on.

So, eating her crust-of-bread breakfast, she passed rapidly along the streets. She remembered afterwards the little groups of people she had seen, eagerly hearing, and imparting news; but at the time her only care was to hasten on her way, in dread of a reprimand from Miss Simmonds.

She went in the house at Jane Wilson's, her heart at the instant giving a strange knock, and sending the rosy flush into her face, at the thought that Jem might possibly be inside the door. But I do assure you, she had not thought of it before. Impatient and loving as she was, her solicitude about Alice on that hurried morning had not been mingled with any thought of him.

Her heart need not have leaped, her colour need not have rushed so painfully to her cheeks, for he was not there. There was the round table, with a cup and saucer, which had evidently been used, and there was Jane Wilson sitting on the other side, crying quietly,

while she ate her breakfast with a sort of unconscious appetite. And there was Mrs. Davenport washing away at a night-cap or so, which, by their simple, old-world make, Mary knew at a glance were Alice's. But nothing—no one else.

Alice was much the same, or rather better of the two, they told her; at any rate she could speak, though it was sad rambling talk. Would Mary like to see her?

Of course she would. Many are interested by seeing their friends under the new aspect of illness; and among the poor there is no wholesome fear of injury or excitement to restrain this wish.

So Mary went up-stairs, accompanied by Mrs. Davenport, wringing the suds off her hands, and speaking in a loud whisper far more audible than her usual voice.

"I mun be hastening home, but I'll come again to-night, time enough to iron her cap; 'twould be a sin and a shame if we let her go dirty now she's ill, when she's been so rare and clean all her life-long. But she's sadly forsaken, poor thing! She'll not know you, Mary, she knows none on us."

The room up-stairs held two beds, one superior in the grandeur of four posts and checked curtains to the other, which had been occupied by the twins in their brief life-time. The smaller had been Alice's bed since she had lived there; but with the natural reverence to one "stricken of God and afflicted," she had been installed since her paralytic stroke the evening before in the larger and grander bed, while Jane Wilson had taken her short broken rest on the little pallet.

Margaret came forwards to meet her friend, whom she half expected, and whose step she knew. Mrs. Davenport returned to her washing.

The two girls did not speak, the presence of Alice awed them into silence. There she lay with the rosy colour, absent from her face since the days of childhood, flushed once more into it by her sickness nigh unto death. She lay on the affected side, and with her other arm she was constantly sawing the air, not exactly in a restless manner, but in a monotonous, incessant way, very trying to a watcher. She was talking away, too, almost as constantly, in a low, indistinct tone. But her face, her profiled countenance, looked calm and smiling, even interested by the ideas that were passing through her clouded mind.

"Listen!" said Margaret, as she stooped her head down to catch the muttered words more distinctly.

"What will mother say? The bees are turning homeward for th' last time, and we've a terrible long bit to go yet. See! here's a linnet's nest in this gorse bush. Th' hen-bird is on it. Look at her bright eyes, she won't stir! Ay! we mun hurry home. Won't mother be pleased with the bonny lot of heather we've got. Make haste, Sally, may be we shall have cockles for supper. I saw the cockle-man's donkey turn up our way fra Arnside."

Margaret touched Mary's hand, and the pressure in return told her that they understood each other; that they knew how in this illness to the old, world-weary woman, God had sent her a veiled blessing: she was

once more in the scenes of her childhood, unchanged and bright as in those long departed days; once more with the sister of her youth, the playmate of fifty years ago, who had for nearly as many years slept in a grassy grave in the little church-yard beyond Burton.

Alice's face changed; she looked sorrowful, almost penitent.

"Oh, Sally! I wish we'd told her. She thinks we were in church all morning, and we've gone on deceiving her. If we'd told her at first how it was—how sweet th' hawthorn smelt through the open church-door, and how we were on the last bench in the aisle, and how it were the first butterfly we'd seen this spring, and how it flew into th' very church itself; oh! mother is so gentle, I wish we'd told her. I'll go to her next time she comes in sight, and say, 'Mother, we were naughty last sabbath.'"

She stopped, and a few tears came stealing down the old withered cheek, at the thought of the temptation and deceit of her childhood. Surely, many sins could not have darkened that innocent child-like spirit since. Mary found a red-spotted pocket-handkerchief, and put it into the hand, which sought about for something to wipe away the trickling tears. She took it, with a gentle murmur.

"Thank you, mother."

Mary pulled Margaret away from the bed.

"Don't you think she's happy, Margaret?"

"Ay! that I do, bless her. She feels no pain, and knows nought of her present state. Oh! that I could see,

Mary! I try and be patient with her afore me, but I'd give aught I have to see her, and see what she wants. I am so useless! I mean to stay here as long as Jane Wilson is alone; and I would fain be here all to-night, but—"

"I'll come," said Mary, decidedly.

"Mrs. Davenport said she'd come again, but she's hard-worked all day—"

"I'll come," repeated Mary.

"Do!" said Margaret, "and I'll be here till you come. May be, Jem and you could take th' night between you, and Jane Wilson might get a bit of sound sleep in his bed; for she were up and down the better part of last night, and just when she were in a sound sleep this morning, between two and three, Jem came home, and th' sound o' his voice roused her in a minute."

"Where had he been till that time o' night?" asked Mary.

"Nay! it were none of my business; and, indeed, I never saw him till he came in here to see Alice. He were in again this morning, and seemed sadly downcast. But you'll, may be, manage to comfort him to-night, Mary," said Margaret, smiling, while a ray of hope glimmered in Mary's heart, and she almost felt glad, for an instant, of the occasion which would at last bring them together. Oh! happy night! when would it come? Many hours had yet to pass.

Then she saw Alice, and repented, with a bitter self-reproach. But she could not help having gladness in the depths of her heart, blame herself as she would. So

she tried not to think, as she hurried along to Miss Simmonds', with a dancing step of lightness.

She was late—that she knew she should be. Miss Simmonds was vexed and cross. That also she had anticipated, but she had intended to smooth her raven down by extraordinary diligence and attention. But there was something about the girls she did not understand—had not anticipated. They stopped talking when she came in; or rather, I should say, stopped listening, for Sally Leadbitter was the talker to whom they were hearkening with intense attention. At first they eyed Mary, as if she had acquired some new interest to them, since the day before. Then they began to whisper; and, absorbed as Mary had been in her own thoughts, she could not help becoming aware that it was of her they spoke.

At last Sally Leadbitter asked Mary if she had heard the news?

"No! What news?" answered she.

The girls looked at each other with gloomy mystery. Sally went on.

"Have you not heard that young Mr. Carson was murdered last night?"

Mary's lips could not utter a negative, but no one who looked at her pale and terror-stricken face could have doubted that she had not heard before of the fearful occurrence.

Oh, it is terrible, that sudden information, that one you have known has met with a bloody death! You seem to shrink from the world where such deeds can be

committed, and to grow sick with the idea of the violent and wicked men of earth. Much as Mary had learned to dread him lately, now he was dead (and dead in such a manner) her feeling was that of oppressive sorrow for him.

The room went round and round, and she felt as though she should faint; but Miss Simmonds came in, bringing a waft of fresher air as she opened the door, to refresh the body, and the certainty of a scolding for inattention to brace the sinking mind. She, too, was full of the morning's news.

"Have you heard any more of this horrid affair, Miss Barton?" asked she, as she settled to her work.

Mary tried to speak; at first she could not, and when she succeeded in uttering a sentence, it seemed as though it were not her own voice that spoke.

"No, ma'am, I never heard of it till this minute."

"Dear! that's strange, for every one is up about it. I hope the murderer will be found out, that I do. Such a handsome young man to be killed as he was. I hope the wretch that did it may be hanged as high as Haman."

One of the girls reminded them that the assizes came on next week.

"Ay," replied Miss Simmonds, "and the milk-man told me they will catch the wretch, and have him tried, and hung in less than a week. Serve him right, whoever he is. Such a handsome young man as he was."

Then each began to communicate to Miss Simmonds the various reports they had heard.

Suddenly she burst out—

"Miss Barton! as I live, dropping tears on that new silk gown of Mrs. Hawkes'! Don't you know they will stain, and make it shabby for ever? Crying like a baby, because a handsome young man meets with an untimely end. For shame of yourself, miss. Mind your character and your work if you please. Or, if you must cry" (seeing her scolding rather increased the flow of Mary's tears, than otherwise), "take this print to cry over. That won't be marked like this beautiful silk," rubbing it, as if she loved it, with a clean pocket-handkerchief, in order to soften the edges of the hard round drops.

Mary took the print, and naturally enough, having had leave given her to cry over it, rather checked the inclination to weep.

Every body was full of the one subject. The girl sent out to match silk, came back with the account gathered at the shop, of the coroner's inquest then sitting; the ladies, who called to speak about gowns, first began about the murder, and mingled details of that, with directions for their dresses. Mary felt as though the haunting horror were a nightmare, a fearful dream, from which awakening would relieve her. The picture of the murdered body, far more ghastly than the reality, seemed to swim in the air before her eyes. Sally Leadbitter looked and spoke of her, almost accusingly, and made no secret now of Mary's conduct, more blameable to her fellow-workwomen for its latter changeableness, than for its former giddy flirting.

"Poor young gentleman," said one, as Sally recounted Mary's last interview with Mr. Carson.

"What a shame!" exclaimed another, looking indignantly at Mary.

"That's what I call regular jilting," said a third. "And he lying cold and bloody in his coffin now!"

Mary was more thankful than she could express, when Miss Simmonds returned, to put a stop to Sally's communications, and to check the remarks of the girls.

She longed for the peace of Alice's sick room. No more thinking with infinite delight of her anticipated meeting with Jem, she felt too much shocked for that now; but longing for peace and kindness, for the images of rest and beauty, and sinless times long ago, which the poor old woman's rambling presented, she wished to be as near death as Alice; to have struggled through this world, whose sufferings she had early learnt, and whose crimes now seemed pressing close upon her. Old texts from the Bible that her mother used to read (or rather spell out) aloud, in the days of childhood, came up to her memory. "Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." "The tears shall be wiped away from all eyes," &c. And it was to that world Alice was hastening! Oh! that she were Alice!

I must return to the Wilsons' house, which was far from being the abode of peace that Mary was picturing it to herself. You remember the reward Mr. Carson offered for the apprehension of the murderer of his son? It was in itself a temptation, and to aid its efficacy came the natural sympathy for the aged parents mourning for

their child, for the young man cut off in the flower of his days; and besides this, there is always a pleasure in unravelling a mystery, in catching at the gossamer clue which will guide to certainty. This feeling, I am sure, gives much impetus to the police. Their senses are ever and always on the qui-vive, and they enjoy the collecting and collating evidence, and the life of adventure they experience; a continual unwinding of Jack Sheppard romances, always interesting to the vulgar and uneducated mind, to which the outward signs and tokens of crime are ever exciting.

There was no lack of clue or evidence at the coroner's inquest that morning. The shot, the finding of the body, the subsequent discovery of the gun, were rapidly deposed to; and then the policeman who had interrupted the quarrel between Jem Wilson and the murdered young man was brought forward, and gave his evidence, clear, simple, and straightforward. The coroner had no hesitation, the jury had none, but the verdict was cautiously worded. "Wilful murder against some person unknown."

This very cautiousness, when he deemed the thing so sure as to require no caution, irritated Mr. Carson. It did not soothe him that the superintendent called the verdict a mere form,—exhibited a warrant empowering him to seize the body of Jem Wilson, committed on suspicion,—declared his intention of employing a well-known officer in the Detective Service to ascertain the ownership of the gun, and collect other evidence, especially as regarded the young woman, about whom the

policeman deposed that the quarrel had taken place: Mr. Carson was still excited and irritable; restless in body and mind. He made every preparation for the accusation of Jem the following morning before the magistrates: he engaged attorneys skilled in criminal practice to watch the case, and prepare briefs; he wrote to celebrated barristers coming the Northern Circuit, to bespeak their services. A speedy conviction, a speedy execution, seemed to be the only things that would satisfy his craving thirst for blood. He would have fain been policeman, magistrate, accusing speaker, all; but most of all, the judge, rising with full sentence of death on his lips.

That afternoon, as Jane Wilson had begun to feel the effect of a night's disturbed rest, evinced in frequent droppings off to sleep while she sat by her sister-in-law's bed-side, lulled by the incessant crooning of the invalid's feeble voice, she was startled by a man speaking in the house-place below, who, wearied of knocking at the door, without obtaining any answer, had entered and was calling lustily for

"Missis! missis!"

When Mrs. Wilson caught a glimpse of the intruder through the stair-rails, she at once saw he was a stranger, a working-man, it might be a fellow-labourer with her son, for his dress was grimy enough for the supposition. He held a gun in his hand.

"May I make bold to ask if this gun belongs to your son?"

She first looked at the man, and then, weary and

alf asleep, not seeing any reason for refusing to answer he inquiry, she moved forward to examine it, talking vhile she looked for certain old-fashioned ornaments on he stock. "It looks like his; ay, it's his, sure enough. I could speak to it anywhere by these marks. You see it were his grandfather's, as were gamekeeper to some one up in th' north; and they don't make guns so smart now-a-days. But, how comed you by it? He sets great store on it. Is he bound for the shooting gallery? He is not, for sure, now his aunt is so ill, and me left all alone;" and the immediate cause for her anxiety being thus recalled to her mind, she entered on a long story of Alice's illness, interspersed with recollections of her husband's and her children's deaths.

The disguised policeman listened for a minute or two, to glean any further information he could; and then, saying he was in a hurry, he turned to go away. She followed him to the door, still telling him her troubles, and was never struck, until it was too late to ask the reason, with the unaccountableness of his conduct, in carrying the gun away with him. Then, as she heavily climbed the stairs, she put away the wonder and the thought about his conduct, by determining to believe he was some workman with whom her son had made some arrangement about shooting at the gallery; or mending the old weapon; or something or other. She had enough to fret her, without moidering herself about old guns. Jem had given it him to bring to her; so it was safe enough; or, if it was not, why she should

be glad never to set eyes on it again, for she could not abide fire-arms, they were so apt to shoot people.

So, comforting herself for her want of thought in not making further inquiry, she fell off into another doze, feverish, dream-haunted, and unrefreshing.

Meanwhile, the policeman walked off with his prize, with an odd mixture of feelings; a little contempt, a little disappointment, and a good deal of pity. The contempt and the disappointment were caused by the widow's easy admission of the gun being her son's property, and her manner of identifying it by the ornaments. He liked an attempt to baffle him; he was accustomed to it, it gave some exercise to his wits and his shrewdness. There would be no fun in fox-hunting, if Reynard yielded himself up without any effort to escape. Then, again, his mother's milk was yet in him, policeman, officer of the Detective Service though he was; and he felt sorry for the old woman, whose "softness" had given such material assistance in identifying her son as the murderer. However, he conveyed the gun, and the intelligence he had gained, to the superintendent; and the result was, that, in a short time afterwards, three policemen went to the works at which Jem was foreman, and announced their errand to the astonished overseer, who directed them to the part of the foundry where Jem was then superintending a casting.

Dark, black were the walls, the ground, the faces around them, as they crossed the yard. But, in the furnace-house a deep and lurid red glared over all; the

furnace roared with mighty flame. The men, like demons, in their fire-and-soot colouring, stood swart around, awaiting the moment when the tons of solid iron should have melted down into fiery liquid, fit to be poured, with still, heavy sound, into the delicate moulding of fine black sand, prepared to receive it. The heat was intense, and the red glare grew every instant more fierce; the policemen stood awed with the novel sight. Then, black figures, holding strange-shaped bucket shovels, came athwart the deep-red furnace light, and clear and brilliant flowed forth the iron into the appropriate mould. The buzz of voices rose again ; there was time to speak, and gasp, and wipe the brows; and then, one by one, the men dispersed to some other branch of their employment.

No. B. 72, pointed out Jem as the man he had seen engaged in a scuffle with Mr. Carson, and then the other two stepped forward, and arrested him, stating of what he was accused, and the grounds of the accusation. He offered no resistance, though he seemed surprised ; but calling a fellow-workman to him, he briefly requested him to tell his mother he had got into trouble, and could not return home at present. He did not wish her to hear more at first.

So Mrs. Wilson's sleep was next interrupted in almost an exactly similar way to the last, like a recurring nightmare.

"Missis ! missis !" some one called out from below.

Again it was a workman, but this time a blacker-looking one than before.

"What don ye want?" said she, peevishly.

"Only, nothing but—" stammered the man, a kind-hearted matter-of-fact person, with no invention, but a great deal of sympathy.

"Well! speak out, can't ye, and ha' done with it?"

"Jem's in trouble," said he, repeating Jem's very words, as he could think of no others.

"Trouble!" said the mother, in a high-pitched voice of distress. "Trouble! God help me, trouble will never end, I think. What d'ye mean by trouble? Speak out man, can't ye? Is he ill? My boy! tell me, is he ill?" in a hurried voice of terror.

"Na, na, that's not it. He's well enough. All he bade me say was, 'tell mother I'm in trouble, and can't come home to-night.'"

"Not come home to-night! And what am I to do with Alice? I can't go on, wearing my life out wi' watching. He might come and help me."

"I tell you he can't," said the man.

"Can't; and he is well, you say. Stuff! It's just that he's getten like other young men, and wants to go a-larking. But I'll give it him when he comes back."

The man turned to go; he durst not trust himself to speak in Jem's justification. But she would not let him off.

She stood between him and the door, as she said,

"Yo shall not go, till you've told me what he's after. I can see plain enough you know, and I'll know too, before I've done."

"You'll know soon enough, missis!"

"I'll know now, I tell ye. What's up that he can't come home and help me nurse? Me, as never got a wink o'sleep last night wi' watching."

"Well, if you will have it out," said the poor badgered man, "the police have got hold on him."

"On my Jem!" said the enraged mother. "You're a downright liar, and that's what you are. My Jem, as never did harm to any one in his life. You're a liar, that's what you are."

"He's done harm enough now," said the man, angry in his turn, "for there's good evidence he murdered young Carson, as was shot last night."

She staggered forward to strike the man for telling the terrible truth; but the weakness of old age, of motherly agony, overcame her, and she sank down on a chair, and covered her face. He could not leave her.

When next she spoke, it was in an imploring, feeble, child-like voice.

"Oh, master, say you're only joking. I ax your pardon if I have vexed ye, but please say you're only joking. You don't know what Jem is to me."

She looked humbly, anxiously up at him.

"I wish I were only joking missis, but it's true as I say. They've taken him up on charge o' murder. It were his gun as were found near th' place; and one o' the police heard him quarrelling with Mr. Carson a few days back, about a girl."

"About a girl!" broke in the mother, once more indignant, though too feeble to show it as before. "My Jem was as steady as—" she hesitated for a compa-

rison wherewith to finish, and then repeated, "as steady as Lucifer, and he were an angel, you know. My Jem was not one to quarrel about a girl."

"Ay, but it was that though. They'd got her name quite pat. The man had heard all they said. Mary Barton was her name, whoever she may be."

"Mary Barton! the dirty hussey! to bring my Jem into trouble of this kind. I'll give it her well when I see her: that I will. Oh! my poor Jem!" rocking herself to and fro. "And what about the gun? What did ye say about that?"

"His gun were found on the spot where the murder were done."

"That's a lie for one, then. A man has got the gun now, safe and sound; I saw it not an hour ago."

The man shook his head.

"Yes, he has indeed. A friend o' Jem's, as he'd lent it to."

"Did you know the chap?" asked the man, who was really anxious for Jem's exculpation, and caught a gleam of hope from her last speech.

"No! I can't say as I did. But he were put on as a workman."

"It's may be only one of them policemen, disguised."

"Nay; they'd never go for to do that, and trick me into telling on my own son. It would be like seething a kid in its mother's milk; and that th' Bible forbids."

"I don't know," replied the man.

Soon afterwards he went away, feeling unable to comfort, yet distressed at the sight of sorrow; she would

fain have detained him, but go he would. And she was alone.

She never for an instant believed Jem guilty; she would have doubted if the sun were fire, first: but sorrow, desolation, and, at times, anger took possession of her mind. She told the unconscious Alice, hoping to rouse her to sympathy; and then was disappointed, because, still smiling and calm, she murmured of her mother, and the happy days of infancy.

CHAPTER III.

"I saw where stark and cold he lay,
Beneath the gallows-tree,
And every one did point and say,
'Twas there he died for thee!'
* * * *
"Oh! weeping heart! Oh, bleeding heart!
What boots thy pity now?
Bid from his eyes that shade depart,
That death-damp from his brow!"
'THE BIRTLE TRAGEDY.'

So there was no more peace in the house of sickness, except to Alice, the dying Alice.

But Mary knew nothing of the afternoon's occurrences; and gladly did she breathe in the fresh air, as she left Miss Simmonds' house, to hasten to the Wilsons'. The very change, from the in-door to the out-door atmosphere, seemed to alter the current of her thoughts. She thought less of the dreadful subject which had so haunted her all day; she cared less for the upbraiding speeches of her fellow work-women; the old association of comfort and sympathy received from Alice gave her the idea that, even now, her bodily presence would soothe and compose those who

were in trouble, changed, unconscious, and absent though her spirit might be.

Then, again, she reproached herself a little for the feeling of pleasure she experienced, in thinking that he whom she dreaded could never more beset her path; in the security with which she could pass each street corner—each shop, where he used to lie in ambush. Oh! beating heart! was there no other little thought of joy lurking within, to gladden the very air without? Was she not going to meet, to see, to hear Jem; and could they fail at last to understand each other's loving hearts.

She softly lifted the latch, with the privilege of friendship. *He* was not there, but his mother was standing by the fire, stirring some little mess or other. Never mind! he would come soon: and, with an unmixed desire to do her grateful duty to all belonging to him, she stepped lightly forwards, unheard by the old lady, who was partly occupied by the simmering, bubbling sound of her bit of cookery; but more with her own sad thoughts, and wailing, half-uttered murmurings.

Mary took off bonnet and shawl with speed, and advancing, made Mrs. Wilson conscious of her presence, by saying,

"Let me do that for you. I'm sure you mun be tired."

Mrs. Wilson slowly turned round, and her eyes gleamed like those of a pent-up wild beast, as she recognised her visitor.

"And is it thee that dares set foot in this house, after what has come to pass? Is it not enough to have robbed

me of my boy with thy arts and thy profligacy, but thou must come here to crow over me—me—his mother? Dost thou know where he is, thou bad hussy, with thy great blue eyes and yellow hair, to lead men on to ruin? Out upon thee, with thy angel's face, thou whited sepulchre. Dost thou know where Jem is, all through thee?"

"No!" quivered out poor Mary, scarcely conscious that she spoke, so daunted, so terrified was she by the indignant mother's greeting.

"He's lying in th' New Bailey," slowly and distinctly spoke the mother, watching the effect of her words, as if believing in their infinite power to pain. "There he lies, waiting to take his trial for murdering young Mr. Carson."

No answer; but such a blanched face, such wild, distended eyes, such trembling limbs, instinctively seeking support!

"Did you know Mr. Carson as now lies dead?" continued the merciless woman. "Folk say you did, and knew him but too well. And that for the sake of such as you, my precious child shot yon chap. But he did not. I know he did not. They may hang him, but his mother will speak to his innocence with her last dying breath."

She stopped more from exhaustion than want of words. Mary spoke, but in so changed and choked a voice that the old woman almost started. It seemed as if some third person must be in the room, the voice was so hoarse and strange.

"Please, say it again. I don't quite understand you. What has Jem done? Please to tell me."

"I never said he had done it. I said, and I'll swear that he never did do it. I don't care who heard 'em quarrel, or if it is his gun as were found near the body. It's not my own Jem as would go for to kill any man, choose how a girl had jilted him. My own good Jem, as was a blessing sent upon the house where he was born." Tears came into the mother's burning eyes as her heart recurred to the days when she had rocked the cradle of "her first-born;" and then, rapidly passing over events, till the full consciousness of his present situation came upon her, and perhaps annoyed at having shown any softness of character in the presence of the Dalilah who had lured him to his danger, she spoke again, and in a sharper tone.

"I told him, and told him to leave off thinking on thee; but he would not be led by me. Thee! wench! thou were not good enough to wipe the dust off his feet. A vile, flirting quean as thou art. It's well thy mother does not know (poor body) what a good-for-nothing thou art."

"Mother! oh mother!" said Mary, as if appealing to the merciful dead. "But I was not good enough for him! I know I was not," added she, in a voice of touching humility.

For through her heart went tolling the ominous, prophetic words he had used when he had last spoken to her.

"Mary! you'll may be hear of me as a drunkard, and may be as a thief, and may be as a murderer. Re-

member! when all are speaking ill of me, you will have no right to blame me, for it's your cruelty that will have made me what I feel I shall become."

And she did not blame him, though she doubted not his guilt; she felt how madly she might act if once jealous of him, and how much cause had she not given him for jealousy, miserable guilty wretch that she was! Speak on, desolate mother! Abuse her as you will. Her broken spirit feels to have merited all.

But her last humble, self-abased words had touched Mrs. Wilson's heart, sore as it was; and she looked at the snow-pale girl with those piteous eyes, so hopeless of comfort, and she relented in spite of herself.

"Thou seest what comes of light conduct, Mary! It's thy doing that suspicion has lighted on him, who is as innocent as the babe unborn. Thou'lt have much to answer for if he's hung. Thou'lt have my death too at thy door!"

Harsh as these words seem, she spoke them in a milder tone of voice than she had yet used. But the idea of Jem on the gallows, Jem dead, took possession of Mary, and she covered her eyes with her wan hands, as if indeed to shut out the fearful sight.

She murmured some words, which though spoken low, as if choked up from the depths of agony, Jane Wilson caught. "My heart is breaking," said she, feebly. "My heart is breaking."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Wilson. "Don't talk in that silly way. My heart has a better right to break than yours, and yet I hold up, you see. But, oh dear!

oh dear!" with a sudden revulsion of feeling, as the reality of the danger in which her son was placed, pressed upon her. "What am I saying? How could I hold up if thou wert gone, Jem? Though I'm as sure as I stand here of thy innocence, if they hang thee, my lad, I will lie down and die!"

She sobbed aloud with bitter consciousness of the fearful chance awaiting her child. She cried more passionately still.

Mary roused herself up.

"Oh, let me stay with you, at any rate, till we know the end. Dearest Mrs. Wilson, mayn't I stay?"

The more obstinately and upbraidingly Mrs. Wilson refused, the more Mary pleaded, with ever the same soft, entreating cry, "Let me stay with you." Her stunned soul seemed to bound its wishes, for the hour at least, to remaining with one who loved and sorrowed for the same human being that she did.

But no. Mrs. Wilson was inflexible.

"I've may be been a bit hard on you, Mary, I'll own that. But I cannot abide you yet with me. I cannot but remember it's your giddiness as has wrought this woe. I'll stay wi' Alice, and perhaps Mrs. Davenport may come help a bit. I cannot put up with you about me. Good-night. To-morrow I may look on you different, may be. Good-night."

And Mary turned out of the house, which had been *his* home, where *he* was loved, and mourned for, into the busy, desolate, crowded street, where they were crying halfpenny broadsides, giving an account of the bloody

murder, the coroner's inquest, and a raw-head-and-bloody-bones picture of the suspected murderer, James Wilson.

But Mary heard not, she heeded not. She staggered on like one in a dream. With hung head and tottering steps, she instinctively chose the shortest cut to that home, which was to her, in her present state of mind, only the hiding place of four walls, where she might vent her agony, unseen and unnoticed by the keen, unkind world without, but where no welcome, no love, no sympathising tears awaited her.

As she neared that home, within two minutes' walk of it, her impetuous course was arrested by a light touch on her arm, and turning hastily, she saw a little Italian boy, with his humble show-box,—a white mouse, or some such thing. The setting sun cast its red glow on his face, otherwise the olive complexion would have been very pale; and the glittering tear-drops hung on the long curled eye-lashes. With his soft voice, and pleading looks, he uttered, in his pretty broken English, the word

"Hungry! so hungry."

And, as if to aid by gesture the effect of the solitary word, he pointed to his mouth, with its white quivering lips.

Mary answered him impatiently,

"Oh, lad, hunger is nothing—nothing!"

And she rapidly passed on. But her heart upbraided her the next minute with her unrelenting speech, and she hastily entered her door and seized the

scanty remnant of food which the cupboard contained, and retraced her steps to the place where the little hopeless stranger had sunk down by his mute companion in loneliness and starvation, and was raining down tears as he spoke in some foreign tongue, with low cries for the far distant "Mamma mia!"

With the elasticity of heart belonging to childhood he sprang up as he saw the food the girl brought; she whose face, lovely in its woe, had tempted him first to address her; and, with the graceful courtesy of his country, he looked up and smiled while he kissed her hand, and then poured forth his thanks, and shared her bounty with his little pet companion. She stood an instant, diverted from the thought of her own grief by the sight of his infantine gladness; and then bending down and kissing his smooth forehead, she left him, and sought to be alone with her agony once more.

She re-entered the house, locked the door, and tore off her bonnet, as if greedy of every moment which took her from the full indulgence of painful, despairing thought.

Then she threw herself on the ground, yes, on the hard flags she threw her soft limbs down; and the comb fell out of her hair, and those bright tresses swept the dusty floor, while she pillowed and hid her face on her arms, and burst forth into hard, suffocating sobs.

Oh, earth! thou didst seem but a dreary dwelling-place for thy poor child that night. None to comfort, none to pity! And self-reproach gnawing at her heart.

Oh, why did she ever listen to the tempter? Why did she ever give ear to her own suggestions, and cravings after wealth and grandeur? Why had she thought it a fine thing to have a rich lover?

She—she had deserved it all; but he was the victim, —he, the beloved. She could not conjecture, she could not even pause to think who had revealed, or how he had discovered her acquaintance with Harry Carson. It was but too clear, some way or another, he had learnt all; and what would he think of her? No hope of his love,—oh, that she would give up, and be content; it was his life, his precious life, that was threatened. Then she tried to recall the particulars, which, when Mrs. Wilson had given them, had fallen but upon a deafened ear,—something about a gun, a quarrel, which she could not remember clearly. Oh, how terrible to think of his crime, his blood-guiltiness; he who had hitherto been so good, so noble, and now an assassin! And then she shrank from him in thought; and then, with bitter remorse, clung more closely to his image with passionate self-upbraiding. Was it not she who had led him to the pit into which he had fallen? Was she to blame him? She to judge him? Who could tell how maddened he might have been by jealousy; how one moment's uncontrollable passion might have led him to become a murderer? And she had blamed him in her heart after his last deprecating, imploring, prophetic speech!

Then she burst out crying afresh; and when weary of crying, fell to thinking again. The gallows! The gal-

lows! Black they stood against the burning light which dazzled her shut eyes, press on them as she would. Oh! she was going mad; and for awhile she lay outwardly still, but with the pulses careering through her head with wild vehemence.

And then came a strange forgetfulness of the present, in thought of the long-past times;—of those days when she hid her face on her mother's pitying, loving bosom, and heard tender words of comfort, be her grief or her error what it might;—of those days when she had felt as if her mother's love was too mighty not to last for ever;—of those days when hunger had been to her (as to the little stranger she had that evening relieved) something to be thought about, and mourned over;—when Jem and she had played together; he, with the condescension of an older child, and she, with unconscious earnestness, believing that he was as much gratified with important trifles as she was;—when her father was a cheery-hearted man, rich in the love of his wife, and the companionship of his friend;—when (for it still worked round to that), when mother was alive, and *he* was not a murderer.

And then Heaven blessed her unaware, and she sank from remembering, to wandering, unconnected thought, and thence to sleep. Yes! it was sleep, though in that strange posture, on that hard cold bed; and she dreamt of the happy times of long ago, and her mother came to her, and kissed her as she lay, and once more the dead were alive again in that happy world of dreams. All was restored to the gladness of childhood, even to the little

kitten, which had been her playmate and bosom friend then, and which had been long forgotten in her waking hours. All the loved ones were there!

She suddenly wakened! Clear and wide awake! Some noise had startled her from sleep. She sat up, and put her hair (still wet with tears) back from her flushed cheeks, and listened. At first she could only hear her beating heart. All was still without, for it was after midnight, such hours of agony had passed away; but the moon shone clearly in at the unshuttered window, making the room almost as light as day, in its cold ghastly radiance. There was a low knock at the door! A strange feeling crept over Mary's heart, as if something spiritual were near; as if the dead so lately present in her dreams, were yet gliding and hovering round her, with their dim, dread forms. And yet, why dread? Had they not loved her?—and who loved her now? Was she not lonely enough to welcome the spirits of the dead, who had loved her while here? If her mother had conscious being, her love for her child endured. So she quietened her fears, and listened—listened still.

"Mary! Mary! open the door!" as a little movement on her part seemed to tell the being outside of her wakeful, watchful state. They were the accents of her mother's voice; the very south-country pronunciation, that Mary so well remembered; and which she had sometimes tried to imitate when alone, with the fond mimicry of affection.

So, without fear, without hesitation, she rose and unbarred the door. There, against the moonlight,

stood a form, so closely resembling her dead mother, that Mary never doubted the identity, but exclaiming (as if she were a terrified child, secure of safety when near the protecting care of its parent)—

"Oh! mother! mother! You are come at last!"

She threw herself, or rather fell into the trembling arms, of her long-lost, unrecognised Aunt Esther.

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CHAPTER IV.

"My rest is gone,
My heart is sore,
Peace find I never,
And never more."
MARGARET'S SONG IN 'FAUST.'

I MUST go back a little to explain the motives which caused Esther to seek an interview with her niece.

The murder had been committed early on Thursday night, and between then and the dawn of the following day, there was ample time for the news to spread far and wide among all those whose duty, or whose want, or whose errors, caused them to be abroad in the streets of Manchester.

Among those who listened to the tale of violence was Esther.

A craving desire to know more took possession of her mind. Far away as she was from Turner Street, she immediately set off to the scene of the murder, which was faintly lighted by the gray dawn as she reached the spot. It was so quiet and still that she could hardly believe it to be the place. The only vestige of any

scuffle or violence was a trail on the dust, as if somebody had been lying there, and then been raised by extraneous force. The little birds were beginning to hop and twitter in the leafless hedge, making the only sound that was near and distinct. She crossed into the field where she guessed the murderer to have stood; it was easy of access, for the worn, stunted hawthorn-hedge had many gaps in it. The night-smell of bruised grass came up from under her feet, as she went towards the saw-pit and carpenter's shed, which, as I have said before, were in a corner of the field near the road, and where one of her informants had told her it was supposed by the police that the murderer had lurked while waiting for his victim. There was no sign, however, that any one had been about the place. If the grass had been bruised or bent where he had trod, it had had enough of the elasticity of life to raise itself under the dewy influences of night. She hushed her breath with involuntary awe, but nothing else told of the violent deed by which a fellow-creature had passed away. She stood still for a minute, imagining to herself the position of the parties, guided by the only circumstance which afforded any evidence, the trailing mark on the dust in the road.

Suddenly (it was before the sun had risen above the horizon) she became aware of something white in the hedge. All other colours wore the same murky hue, though the forms of objects were perfectly distinct. What was it? It could not be a flower;—that, the time of year made clear. A frozen lump of snow, lingering

late in one of the gnarled tufts of the hedge? She stepped forwards to examine. It proved to be a little piece of stiff writing-paper compressed into a round shape. She understood it instantly; it was the paper that had served as wadding for the murderer's gun. Then she had been standing just where the murderer must have been but a few hours before; probably (as the rumour had spread through the town, reaching her ears) one of the poor maddened turn-outs, who hung about everywhere, with black, fierce looks, as if contemplating some deed of violence. Her sympathy was all with them, for she had known what they suffered; and besides this there was her own individual dislike of Mr. Carson, and dread of him for Mary's sake. Yet, poor Mary! Death was a terrible, though sure, remedy for the evil Esther had dreaded for her; and how would she stand the shock, loving as her aunt believed her to do? Poor Mary! who would comfort her? Esther's thoughts began to picture her sorrow, her despair, when the news of her lover's death should reach her; and she longed to tell her there might have been a keener grief yet had he lived.

Bright, beautiful came the slanting rays of the morning sun. It was time for such as she to hide themselves, with the other obscene things of night, from the glorious light of day, which was only for the happy. So she turned her steps towards town, still holding the paper. But in getting over the hedge it encumbered her to hold it in her clasped hand, and she threw it down. She passed on a few steps, her thoughts still of Mary, till the idea crossed her mind, could it (blank as it appeared

to be) give any clue to the murderer? As I said before, her sympathies were all on that side, so she turned back and picked it up; and then feeling as if in some measure an accessory, she hid it unexamined in her hand, and hastily passed out of the street at the opposite end to that by which she had entered it.

And what do you think she felt, when, having walked some distance from the spot, she dared to open the crushed piece, and saw written on it Mary Barton's name, and not only that, but the street in which she lived! True, a letter or two was torn off, but, nevertheless, there was the name clear to be recognised. And oh! what terrible thought flashed into her mind; or was it only fancy? But it looked very like the writing which she had once known well—the writing of Jem Wilson, who, when she lived at her brother-in-law's, and he was a near neighbour, had often been employed by her to write her letters to people, to whom she was ashamed of sending her own mispelt scrawl. She remembered the wonderful flourishes she had so much admired in those days, while she sat by dictating, and Jem, in all the pride of newly-acquired penmanship, used to dazzle her eyes by extraordinary graces and twirls.

If it were his!

Oh! perhaps it was merely that her head was running so on Mary, that she was associating every trifle with her. As if only one person wrote in that flourishing, meandering style!

It was enough to fill her mind to think from what she might have saved Mary by securing the paper. She

would look at it just once more, and see if some very dense and stupid policeman could have mistaken the name, or if Mary would certainly have been dragged into notice in the affair.

No! no one could have mistaken the " ry Barton," and it *was* Jem's handwriting!

Oh! if it was so, she understood it all, and she had been the cause! With her violent and unregulated nature, rendered morbid by the course of life she led, and her consciousness of her degradation, she cursed herself for the interference which she believed had led to this; for the information and the warning she had given to Jem, which had roused him to this murderous action. How could she, the abandoned and polluted outcast, ever have dared to hope for a blessing, even on her efforts to do good? The black curse of Heaven rested on all her doings, were they for good or for evil.

Poor, diseased mind! and there were none to minister to thee!

So she wandered about, too restless to take her usual heavy morning's sleep; up and down the streets, greedily listening to every word of the passers by, and loitering near each group of talkers, anxious to scrape together every morsel of information, or conjecture, or suspicion, though without possessing any definite purpose in all this. And ever and always she clenched the scrap of paper which might betray so much, until her nails had deeply indented the palm of her hand; so fearful was she in her nervous dread, lest unawares she should let it drop.

Towards the middle of the day she could no longer evade the body's craving want of rest and refreshment; but the rest was taken in a spirit vault, and the refreshment was a glass of gin.

Then she started up from the stupor she had taken for repose; and suddenly driven before the gusty impulses of her mind, she pushed her way to the place where at that very time the police were bringing the information they had gathered with regard to the all-engrossing murder. She listened with painful acuteness of comprehension to dropped words and unconnected sentences, the meaning of which became clearer, and yet more clear to her. Jem was suspected. Jem was ascertained to be the murderer.

She saw him (although he, absorbed in deep sad thought, saw her not), she saw him brought, handcuffed, and guarded out of the coach. She saw him enter the station,—she gasped for breath till he came out, still hand-cuffed, and still guarded, to be conveyed to the New Bailey.

He was the only one who had spoken to her with hope, that she might yet win her way back to virtue. His words had lingered in her heart with a sort of call to Heaven, like distant Sabbath bells, although in her despair she had turned away from his voice. He was the only one who had spoken to her kindly. The murder, shocking though it was, was an absent, abstract thing, on which her thoughts could not, and would not dwell; all that was present in her mind was Jem's danger, and his kindness.

Then Mary came to remembrance. Esther wondered till she was sick of wondering, in what way she was taking the affair. In some manner it would be a terrible blow for the poor, motherless girl; with her dreadful father, too, who was to Esther a sort of accusing angel.

She set off towards the court where Mary lived, to pick up what she could there of information. But she was ashamed to enter in where once she had been innocent, and hung about the neighbouring streets, not daring to question, so she learnt but little; nothing in fact but the knowledge of John Barton's absence from home.

She went up a dark entry to rest her weary limbs on a door-step and think. Her elbows on her knees, her face hidden in her hands, she tried to gather together and arrange her thoughts. But still every now and then she opened her hand, to see if the paper were yet there.

She got up at last. She had formed a plan, and had a course of action to look forward to that would satisfy one craving desire at least. The time was long gone by when there was much wisdom or consistency in her projects.

It was getting late, and that was so much the better. She went to a pawnshop, and took off her finery in a back room. She was known by the people, and had a character for honesty, so she had no very great difficulty in inducing them to let her have a suit of outer clothes, befitting the wife of a working-man, a black silk bonnet, a printed gown, a plaid shawl, dirty and rather worn to

be sure, but which had a sort of sanctity to the eyes of the street-walker, as being the appropriate garb of that happy class to which she could never, never more belong.

She looked at herself in the little glass which hung against the wall, and sadly shaking her head, thought how easy were the duties of that Eden of innocence from which she was shut out; how she would work, and toil, and starve, and die, if necessary, for a husband, a home,—for children,—but that thought she could not bear; a little form rose up, stern in its innocence, from the witches' cauldron of her imagination, and she rushed into action again.

You know now how she came to stand by the threshold of Mary's door, waiting, trembling, until the latch was lifted, and her niece, with words that spoke of such desolation among the living, fell into her arms.

She had felt as if some holy spell would prevent her (even as the unholy Lady Geraldine was prevented, in the abode of Christabel) from crossing the threshold of that home of her early innocence; and she had meant to wait for an invitation. But Mary's helpless action did away with all reluctant feeling, and she bore or dragged her to a seat, and looked on her bewildered eyes, as, puzzled with the likeness, which was not identity, she gazed on her aunt's features.

In pursuance of her plan, Esther meant to assume the manners and character, as she had done the dress, of a mechanic's wife; but then, to account for her long absence, and her long silence towards all that ought to have been dear to her, it was necessary that she should

put on an indifference far distant from her heart, which was loving and yearning, in spite of all its faults. And, perhaps, she overacted her part, for certainly Mary felt a kind of repugnance to the changed and altered aunt, who so suddenly re-appeared on the scene; and it would have cut Esther to the very core, could she have known how her little darling of former days was feeling towards her.

"You don't remember me I see, Mary!" she began. "It's a long while since I left you all, to be sure; and I, many a time, thought of coming to see you, and—and your father. But I live so far off, and am always so busy, I cannot do just what I wish. You recollect aunt Esther, don't you, Mary?"

"Are you aunt Hetty?" asked Mary, faintly, still looking at the face which was so different from the old recollections of her aunt's fresh dazzling beauty.

"Yes! I am aunt Hetty. Oh! it's so long since I heard that name," sighing forth the thoughts it suggested; then recovering herself, and striving after the hard character she wished to assume, she continued: "and to-day I heard a friend of yours, and of mine too, long ago, was in trouble, and I guessed you would be in sorrow, so I thought I would just step this far and see you."

Mary's tears flowed afresh, but she had no desire to open her heart to her strangely-found aunt, who had, by her own confession, kept aloof from and neglected them for so many years. Yet she tried to feel grateful for kindness (however late) from any one, and wished to be civil. Moreover, she had a strong disinclination

to speak on the terrible subject uppermost in her mind. So, after a pause she said,

"Thank you. I dare say you mean very kind. Have you had a long walk? I'm so sorry," said she, rising, with a sudden thought, which was as suddenly checked by recollection, "but I've nothing to eat in the house, and I'm sure you must be hungry, after your walk."

For Mary concluded that certainly her aunt's residence must be far away on the other side of the town, out of sight or hearing. But, after all, she did not think much about her; her heart was so aching-full of other things, that all besides seemed like a dream. She received feelings and impressions from her conversation with her aunt, but did not, could not put them together, or think, or argue about them.

And Esther! How scanty had been her food for days and weeks, her thinly-covered bones and pale lips might tell, but her words should never reveal! So, with a little unreal laugh, she replied,

"Oh! Mary, my dear! don't talk about eating. We've the best of every thing, and plenty of it, for my husband is in good work. I'd such a supper before I came out. I could not touch a morsel if you had it."

Her words shot a strange pang through Mary's heart. She had always remembered her aunt's loving and unselfish disposition; how was it changed, if, living in plenty, she had never thought it worth while to ask after relations, who were all but starving! She shut up her heart instinctively against her aunt.

And all the time poor Esther was swallowing her

sobs, and over-acting her part, and controlling herself more than she had done for many a long day, in order that her niece might not be shocked and revolted, by the knowledge of what her aunt had become :—a prostitute; an outcast.

For she longed to open her wretched, wretched heart, so hopeless, so abandoned by all living things, to one who had loved her once; and yet she refrained, from dread of the averted eye, the altered voice, the internal loathing, which she feared such disclosure might create. She would go straight to the subject of the day. She could not tarry long, for she felt unable to support the character she had assumed for any length of time.

They sat by the little round table, facing each other. The candle was placed right between them, and Esther moved it in order to have a clearer view of Mary's face, so that she might read her emotions, and ascertain her interests. Then she began:

"It's a bad business, I'm afraid, this of Mr. Carson's murder."

Mary winced a little.

"I hear Jem Wilson is taken up for it."

Mary covered her eyes with her hands, as if to shade them from the light, and Esther herself, less accustomed to self-command, was getting too much agitated for calm observation of another.

"I was taking a walk near Turner Street, and I went to see the spot," continued Esther, "and, as luck would have it, I spied this bit of paper in the hedge,"

producing the precious piece still folded in her hand. "It has been used as wadding for the gun, I reckon; indeed, that's clear enough, from the shape it's crammed into. I was sorry for the murderer, whoever he might be (I did not then know of Jem's being suspected), and I thought I would never leave a thing about, as might help, if ever so little, to convict him; the police are so 'cute about straws. So I carried it a little way, and then I opened it, and saw your name, Mary."

Mary took her hands away from her eyes, and looked with surprise at her aunt's face, as she uttered these words. She *was* kind after all, for was she not saving her from being summoned, and from being questioned, and examined; a thing to be dreaded above all others: as she felt sure that her unwilling answers, frame them how she might, would add to the suspicions against Jem; her aunt was indeed kind, to think of what would spare her this.

Esther went on, without noticing Mary's look. The very action of speaking was so painful to her, and so much interrupted by the hard, raking little cough, which had been her constant annoyance for months, that she was too much engrossed by the physical difficulty of utterance, to be a very close observer.

"There could be no mistake if they had found it. Look at your name, together with the very name of this court! And in Jem's hand-writing too, or I'm much mistaken. Look, Mary!"

And now she did watch her.

Mary took the paper, and flattened it; then suddenly

stood stiff up, with irrepressible movement, as if petrified by some horror abruptly disclosed; her face, strung and rigid; her lips compressed tight, to keep down some rising exclamation. She dropped on her seat, as suddenly as if the braced muscles had in an instant given way. But she spoke no word.

"It is his hand-writing—isn't it?" asked Esther, though Mary's manner was almost confirmation enough.

"You will not tell. You never will tell," demanded Mary, in a tone so sternly earnest, as almost to be threatening.

"Nay, Mary," said Esther, rather reproachfully, "I am not so bad as that. Oh! Mary, you cannot think I would do that, whatever I may be."

The tears sprang to her eyes, at the idea that she was suspected of being one who would help to inform against an old friend.

Mary caught her sad and upbraiding look.

"No! I know you would not tell, aunt. I don't know what I say, I am so shocked. But say you will not tell. Do."

"No, indeed I will not tell, come what may."

Mary sat still, looking at the writing, and turning the paper round with careful examination, trying to hope, but her very fears belying her hopes.

"I thought you cared for the young man that's murdered," observed Esther, half aloud; but feeling that she could not mistake this strange interest in the suspected murderer, implied by Mary's eagerness to screen him from any thing which might strengthen suspicion against

him. She had come, desirous to know the extent of Mary's grief for Mr. Carson, and glad of the excuse afforded her by the important scrap of paper. Her remark about its being Jem's hand-writing, she had, with this view of ascertaining Mary's state of feeling, felt to be most imprudent the instant after she had uttered it; but Mary's anxiety that she should not tell, was too great, and too decided, to leave a doubt as to her interest for Jem. She grew more and more bewildered, and her dizzy head refused to reason. Mary never spoke She held the bit of paper firmly, determined to retain possession of it, come what might; and anxious, and impatient, for her aunt to go. As she sat, her face bore a likeness to Esther's dead child.

"You are so like my little girl, Mary!" said Esther, weary of the one subject on which she could get no satisfaction, and recurring, with full heart, to the thought of the dead.

Mary looked up. Her aunt had children, then. That was all the idea she received. No faint imagination of the love and the woe of that poor creature crossed her mind, or she would have taken her, all guilty and erring, to her bosom, and tried to bind up the broken heart. No! it was not to be. Her aunt had children, then; and she was on the point of putting some question about them, but before it could be spoken another thought turned it aside, and she went back to her task of unravelling the mystery of the paper, and the hand-writing. Oh! how she wished her aunt would go.

As if, according to the believers in mesmerism, the

intenseness of her wish gave her power over another, although the wish was unexpressed, Esther felt herself unwelcome, and that her absence was desired.

She felt this some time before she could summon up resolution to go. She was so much disappointed in this longed-for, dreaded interview with Mary; she had wished to impose upon her with her tale of married respectability, and yet she had yearned and craved for sympathy in her real lot. And she had imposed upon her well. She should perhaps be glad of it afterwards; but her desolation of hope seemed for the time redoubled. And she must leave the old dwelling-place, whose very walls, and flags, dingy and sordid as they were, had a charm for her. Must leave the abode of poverty, for the more terrible abodes of vice. She must—she would go.

"Well, good-night, Mary. That bit of paper is safe enough with you, I see. But you made me promise I would not tell about it, and you must promise me to destroy it before you sleep."

"I promise," said Mary, hoarsely, but firmly. "Then you are going?"

"Yes. Not if you wish me to stay. Not if I could be of any comfort to you, Mary;" catching at some glimmering hope.

"Oh, no," said Mary, anxious to be alone. "Your husband will be wondering where you are. Some day you must tell me all about yourself. I forget what your name is?"

"Fergusson," said Esther, sadly.

"Mrs. Fergusson," repeated Mary, half unconsciously. "And where did you say you lived?"

"I never did say," muttered Esther; then aloud, "In Angel's Meadow, 145, Nicholas Street."

"145, Nicholas Street, Angel Meadow. I shall remember."

As Esther drew her shawl around her, and prepared to depart, a thought crossed Mary's mind that she had been cold and hard in her manner towards one, who had certainly meant to act kindly in bringing her the paper (that dread, terrible piece of paper), and thus saving her from———she could not rightly think how much, or how little she was spared. So, desirous of making up for her previous indifferent manner, she advanced to kiss her aunt before her departure.

But, to her surprise, her aunt pushed her off with a frantic kind of gesture, and saying the words,

"Not me. You must never kiss me. You!"

She rushed into the outer darkness of the street; and there wept long and bitterly.

CHAPTER V.

"There was a listening fear in her regard,
As if calamity had but begun;
As if the vanward clouds of evil days
Had spent their malice, and the sullen rear
Was, with its stored thunder, labouring up."
KEATS' 'HYPERION.'

No sooner was Mary alone than she fastened the door, and put the shutters up against the window, which had all this time remained shaded only by the curtains hastily drawn together on Esther's entrance, and the lighting of the candle.

She did all this with the same compressed lips, and the same stony look that her face had assumed on the first examination of the paper. Then she sat down for an instant to think; and rising directly, went, with a step rendered firm by inward resolution of purpose, up the stairs;—passed her own door, two steps, into her father's room. What did she want there?

I must tell you; I must put into words the dreadful secret which she believed that bit of paper had revealed to her.

Her father was the murderer!

That corner of stiff, shining, thick writing-paper, she

recognised as part of the sheet on which she had copied Samuel Bamford's beautiful lines so many months ago—copied (as you perhaps remember) on the blank part of a valentine sent to her by Jem Wilson, in those days when she did not treasure and hoard up every thing he had touched, as she would do now.

That copy had been given to her father for whom it was made, and she had occasionally seen him reading it over, not a fortnight ago she was sure. But she resolved to ascertain if the other part still remained in his possession. He might, it was just possible he *might*, have given it away to some friend; and if so, that person was the guilty one, for she could swear to the paper anywhere.

First of all she pulled out every article from the little old chest of drawers. Amongst them were some things which had belonged to her mother, but she had no time now to examine and try and remember them. All the reverence she could pay them was to carry them and lay them on the bed carefully, while the other things were tossed impatiently out upon the floor.

The copy of Bamford's lines was not there. Oh! perhaps he might have given it away; but then must it not it have been to Jem? It was his gun.

And she set to with redoubled vigour to examine the deal-box which served as chair, and which had once contained her father's Sunday clothes, in the days when he could afford to have Sunday clothes.

He had redeemed his better coat from the pawn-shop before he left, that she had noticed. Here was his old one. What rustled under her hand in the pocket?

The paper! "Oh! Father!"

Yes, it fitted; jagged end to jagged end, letter to letter; and even the part which Esther had considered blank had its tallying mark with the larger piece, its tails of *y*s and *g*s. And then, as if that were not damning evidence enough, she felt again, and found some little bullets or shot (I don't know which you would call them) in that same pocket, along with a small paper parcel of gunpowder. As she was going to replace the jacket, having abstracted the paper, and bullets, &c., she saw a woollen gun-case, made of that sort of striped horse-cloth you must have seen a thousand times appropriated to such a purpose. The sight of it made her examine still further, but there was nothing else that could afford any evidence, so she locked the box, and sat down on the floor to contemplate the articles; now with a sickening despair, now with a kind of wondering curiosity, how her father had managed to evade observation. After all it was easy enough. He had evidently got possession of some gun (was it really Jem's; was he an accomplice? No! she did not believe it; he never, never would deliberately plan a murder with another, however he might be wrought up to it by passionate feeling at the time. Least of all would he accuse her to her father, without previously warning her; it was out of his nature).

Then having obtained possession of the gun, her father had loaded it at home, and might have carried it away with him sometime, when the neighbours were not noticing, and she was out, or asleep; and then he might have hidden it somewhere to be in readiness when he

should want it. She was sure he had no such thing with him when he went away the last time.

She felt it was of no use to conjecture his motives. His actions had become so wild and irregular of late, that she could not reason upon them. Besides, was it not enough to know that he was guilty of this terrible offence. Her love for her father seemed to return with painful force, mixed up as it was with horror at his crime. That dear father, who was once so kind, so warm-hearted, so ready to help either man or beast in distress, to murder! But, in the desert of misery with which these thoughts surrounded her, the arid depths of whose gloom she dared not venture to contemplate, a little spring of comfort was gushing up at her feet, unnoticed at first, but soon to give her strength and hope.

And *that* was the necessity for exertion on her part which this discovery enforced.

Oh! I do think that the necessity for exertion, for some kind of action (bodily or mental) in time of distress, is a most infinite blessing, although the first efforts at such seasons are painful. Something to be done implies that there is yet hope of some good thing to be accomplished, or some additional evil that may be avoided; and by degrees the hope absorbs much of the sorrow.

It is the woes that cannot in any earthly way be escaped that admit least earthly comforting. Of all trite, worn-out, hollow mockeries of comfort that were ever uttered by people who will not take the trouble of sympathising with others, the one I dislike the most is the exhortation not to grieve over an event, "for it can-

not be helped." Do you think if I could help it, I would sit still with folded hands, content to mourn? Do you not believe that as long as hope remained I would be up and doing? I mourn because what has occurred cannot be helped. The reason you give me for not grieving, is the very and sole reason of my grief. Give me nobler and higher reasons for enduring meekly what my Father sees fit to send, and I will try earnestly and faithfully to be patient; but mock me not, or any other mourner, with the speech, "Do not grieve, for it cannot be helped. It is past remedy."

But some remedy to Mary's sorrow came with thinking. If her father was guilty, Jem was innocent. If innocent, there was a possibility of saving him. He must be saved. And she must do it; for was not she the sole depositary of the terrible secret? Her father was not suspected; and never should be, if by any foresight or any exertions of her own she could prevent it.

She did not yet know how Jem was to be saved, while her father was also to be considered innocent. It would require much thought, and much prudence. But with the call upon her exertions, and her various qualities of judgment and discretion, came the answering consciousness of innate power to meet the emergency. Every step now, nay, the employment of every minute, was of consequence; for you must remember she had learnt at Miss Simmonds' the probability that the murderer would be brought to trial the next week. And you must remember, too, that never was so young a girl so friendless, or so penniless, as Mary was at this

time. But the lion accompanied Una through the wilderness and the danger ; and so will a high, resolved purpose of right-doing ever guard and accompany the helpless.

It struck two ; deep, mirk, night.

It was of no use bewildering herself with plans this weary, endless night. Nothing could be done before morning : and, at first in her impatience, she began to long for day ; but then she felt in how unfit a state her body was for any plan of exertion, and she resolutely made up her mind to husband her physical strength.

First of all she must burn the tell-tale paper. The powder, bullets, and gun-case, she tied into a bundle, and hid in the sacking of the bed for the present, although there was no likelihood of their affording evidence against any one. Then she carried the paper down stairs, and burnt it on the hearth, powdering the very ashes with her fingers, and dispersing the fragments of fluttering black films among the cinders of the grate. Then she breathed again.

Her head ached with dizzying violence ; she must get quit of the pain or it would incapacitate her for thinking and planning. She looked for food, but there was nothing but a little raw oatmeal in the house : still, although it almost choked her, she ate some of this, knowing from experience, how often headaches were caused by long fasting. Then she sought for some water to bathe her throbbing temples, and quench her feverish thirst. There was none in the house, so she took the jug and went out to the pump at the other

end of the court, whose echoes resounded her light footsteps in the quiet stillness of the night. The hard, square outlines of the houses cut sharply against the cold bright sky, from which myriads of stars were shining down in eternal repose. There was little sympathy in the outward scene, with the internal trouble. All was so still, so motionless, so hard! Very different to this lovely night in the country in which I am now writing, where the distant horizon is soft and undulating in the moonlight, and the nearer trees sway gently to and fro in the night-wind with something of almost human motion; and the rustling air makes music among their branches, as if speaking soothingly to the weary ones, who lie awake in heaviness of heart. The sights and sounds of such a night lull pain and grief to rest.

But Mary re-entered her home after she had filled her pitcher, with a still stronger sense of anxiety, and a still clearer conviction of how much rested upon her unassisted and friendless self, alone with her terrible knowledge, in the hard, cold, populous world.

She bathed her forehead, and quenched her thirst, and then, with wise deliberation of purpose, went upstairs, and undressed herself, as if for a long night's slumber, although so few hours intervened before day-dawn. She believed she never could sleep, but she lay down, and shut her eyes; and before many minutes she was in as deep and sound a slumber as if there was no sin nor sorrow in the world.

She awakened, as it was natural, much refreshed in

body; but with a consciousness of some great impending calamity. She sat up in bed to recollect, and when she did remember, she sank down again with all the helplessness of despair. But it was only the weakness of an instant; for were not the very minutes precious, for deliberation if not for action?

Before she had finished the necessary morning business of dressing, and setting her house in some kind of order, she had disentangled her ravelled ideas, and arranged some kind of a plan for action. If Jem was innocent (and now, of his guilt, even his slightest participation in, or knowledge of the murder, she acquitted him with all her heart and soul), he must have been somewhere else when the crime was committed; probably with some others, who might bear witness to the fact, if she only knew where to find them. Every thing rested on her. She had heard of an alibi, and believed it might mean the deliverance she wished to accomplish; but she was not quite sure, and determined to apply to Job, as one of the few among her acquaintance gifted with the knowledge of hard words, for to her, all terms of law, or natural history, were alike many-syllabled mysteries.

No time was to be lost. She went straight to Job Legh's house, and found the old man and his grand-daughter sitting at breakfast; as she opened the door she heard their voices speaking in a grave, hushed, subdued tone, as if something grieved their hearts. They stopped talking on her entrance, and then she knew they had been conversing about the murder; about Jem's probable guilt;

and (it flashed upon her for the first time) on the new light they would have obtained regarding herself: for until now they had never heard of her giddy flirting with Mr. Carson; not in all her confidential talk with Margaret had she ever spoken of him. And now Margaret would hear her conduct talked of by all, as that of a bold, bad girl; and even if she did not believe every thing that was said, she could hardly help feeling wounded, and disappointed in Mary.

So it was in a timid voice that Mary wished her usual good-morrow, and her heart sank within her a little, when Job, with a form of civility, bade her welcome in that dwelling, where, until now, she had been too well assured to require to be asked to sit down.

She took a chair. Margaret continued silent.

"I am come to speak to you about this—about Jem Wilson."

"It's a bad business, I'm afeared," replied Job, sadly.

"Ay, it's bad enough anyhow. But Jem's innocent. Indeed he is; I'm as sure as sure can be."

"How can you know, wench? Facts bear strong again him, poor fellow, though he'd a deal to put him up, and aggravate him, they say. Ay, poor lad, he's done for himself, I'm afeared."

"Job!" said Mary, rising from her chair in her eagerness, "you must not say he did it. He did not; I'm sure and certain he didn't. Oh! why do you shake your head? Who is to believe me,—who is to think him innocent, if you, who know'd him so well, stick to it he's guilty?"

"I'm loth enough to do it, lass," replied Job; "but I think he's been ill used, and—jilted (that's plain truth, Mary, hard as it may seem), and his blood has been up—many a man has done the like afore, from like causes."

"Oh, God! Then you won't help me, Job, to prove him innocent? Oh! Job, Job; believe me, Jem never did liarm to no one."

"Not afore;—and mind, wench! I don't over-blame him for this." Job relapsed into silence.

Mary thought a moment.

"Well, Job, you'll not refuse me this, I know. I won't mind what you think, if you'll help me as if he was innocent. Now suppose I know—I knew he was innocent,—it's only supposing, Job,—what must I do to prove it? Tell me, Job! Is not it called an *alibi*, the getting folk to swear to where he really was at the time?"

"Best way, if you know'd him innocent, would be to find out the real murderer. Some one did it, that's clear enough. If it was not Jem, who was it?"

"How can I tell?" answered Mary, in an agony of terror, lest Job's question was prompted by any suspicion of the truth.

But he was far enough from any such thought. Indeed, he had no doubt in his own mind that Jem had, in some passionate moment, urged on by slighted love and jealousy, been the murderer. And he was strongly inclined to believe, that Mary was aware of this, only that, too late repentant of her light conduct which had

led to such fatal consequences, she was now most anxious to save her old play-fellow, her early friend, from the doom awaiting the shedder of blood.

"If Jem's not done it, I don't see as any on us can tell who did. We might find out something if we'd time; but they say he's to be tried on Tuesday. It's no use hiding it, Mary; things looks strong against him."

"I know they do! I know they do! But, oh! Job! is not an *alibi* a proving where he really was at the time of the murder; and how must I set about an *alibi?*"

"An *alibi* is that, sure enough." He thought a little. "You mun ask his mother his doings, and his whereabouts that night; the knowledge of that will guide you a bit."

For he was anxious that on another should fall the task of enlightening Mary on the hopelessness of the case, and he felt that her own sense would be more convinced by inquiry and examination than any mere assertion of his.

Margaret had sat silent and grave all this time. To tell the truth, she was surprised and disappointed by the disclosure of Mary's conduct, with regard to Mr. Henry Carson. Gentle, reserved, and prudent herself, never exposed to the trial of being admired for her personal appearance, and unsusceptible enough to be in doubt even yet, whether the fluttering, tender, infinitely-joyous feeling, she was for the first time experiencing, at sight, or sound, or thought of Will Wilson,

was love or not,—Margaret had no sympathy with the temptations to which loveliness, vanity, ambition, or the desire of being admired, exposes so many; no sympathy with flirting girls, in short. Then, she had no idea of the strength of the conflict between will and principle in some who were differently constituted from herself. With her, to be convinced that an action was wrong, was tantamount to a determination not to do so again; and she had little or no difficulty in carrying out her determination. So she could not understand how it was that Mary had acted wrongly, and had felt too much ashamed, in spite of all internal sophistry, to speak of her actions. Margaret considered herself deceived; felt aggrieved; and, at the time of which I am now telling you, was strongly inclined to give Mary up altogether, as a girl devoid of the modest proprieties of her sex, and capable of gross duplicity, in speaking of one lover as she had done of Jem, while she was encouraging another in attentions, at best of a very doubtful character.

But now Margaret was drawn into the conversation. Suddenly it flashed across Mary's mind, that the night of the murder was the very night, or rather the same early morning, that Margaret had been with Alice. She turned sharp round, with—

"Oh! Margaret, you can tell me; you were there when he came back that night; were you not? No! you were not; but you were there not many hours after. Did not you hear where he had been? He was away the night before, too, when Alice was first

taken; when you were there for your tea. Oh! where was he, Margaret?"

"I don't know," she answered. "Stay! I do remember something about his keeping Will company, in his walk to Liverpool. I can't justly say what it was, so much happened that night."

"I'll go to his mother's," said Mary, resolutely.

They neither of them spoke, either to advise or dissuade. Mary felt she had no sympathy from them, and braced up her soul to act without such loving aid of friendship. She knew that their advice would be willingly given at her demand, and that was all she really required for Jem's sake. Still her courage failed a little as she walked to Jane Wilson's, alone in the world with her secret.

Jane Wilson's eyes were swelled with crying; and it was sad to see the ravages which intense anxiety and sorrow had made on her appearance in four-and-twenty hours. All night long she and Mrs. Davenport had crooned over their sorrows, always recurring, like the burden of an old song, to the dreadest sorrow of all, which was now impending over Mrs. Wilson. She had grown—I hardly know what word to use—but, something like proud of her martyrdom; she had grown to hug her grief; to feel an excitement in her agony of anxiety about her boy.

"So, Mary, you're here! Oh! Mary, lass! He's to be tried on Tuesday."

She fell to sobbing, in the convulsive breath-catching manner which tells so of much previous weeping.

"Oh! Mrs. Wilson, don't take on so! We'll get him off, you'll see. Don't fret; they can't prove him guilty!"

"But I tell thee they will," interrupted Mrs. Wilson, half-irritated at the light way, as she considered it, in which Mary spoke; and a little displeased that another could hope when she had almost brought herself to find pleasure in despair.

"It may suit thee well," continued she, "to make light of the misery thou hast caused; but I shall lay his death at thy door, as long as I live, and die I know he will; and all for what he never did—no, he never did; my own blessed boy!"

She was too weak to be angry long; her wrath sank away to feeble sobbing and worn-out moans.

Mary was most anxious to soothe her from any violence of either grief or anger; she did so want her to be clear in her recollection; and, besides, her tenderness was great towards Jem's mother. So she spoke in a low gentle tone the loving sentences, which sound so broken and powerless in repetition, and which yet have so much power, when accompanied with caressing looks and actions, fresh from the heart; and the old woman insensibly gave herself up to the influence of those sweet, loving blue eyes, those tears of sympathy, those words of love and hope, and was lulled into a less morbid state of mind.

"And now, dear Mrs. Wilson, can you remember where he said he was going on Thursday night? He was out when Alice was taken ill; and he did not come

home till early in the morning, or, to speak true, in the night: did he?"

"Ay! he went out near upon five; he went out with Will; he said he were going to set* him a part of the way, for Will were hot upon walking to Liverpool, and would not hearken to Jem's offer of lending him five shilling for his fare. So the two lads set off together. I mind it all now; but, thou seest, Alice's illness, and this business of poor Jem's, drove it out of my head; they went off together, to walk to Liverpool; that's to say, Jem were to go a part of the way. But, who knows" (falling back into the old desponding tone) "if he really went? He might be led off on the road. Oh! Mary, wench! they'll hang him for what he's never done."

"No, they won't—they shan't! I see my way a bit now. We mun get Will to help; there'll be time. He can swear that Jem were with him. Where is Jem?"

"Folk said he were taken to Kirkdale, in the prison-van, this morning; without my seeing him, poor chap! Oh! wench! but they've hurried on the business at a cruel rate."

"Ay! they've not let grass grow under their feet, in hunting out the man that did it," said Mary, sorrowfully and bitterly. "But keep up your heart. They got on the wrong scent when they took to suspecting Jem. Don't be afeard. You'll see it will end right for Jem."

"I should mind it less if I could do aught," said

* "To set," to accompany.

Jane Wilson; "but I'm such a poor weak old body, and my head's so gone, and I'm so dazed-like, what with Alice and all, that I think and think, and can do nought to help my child. I might ha' gone and seen him last night, they tell me now, and then I missed it. Oh! Mary, I missed it; and I may never see the lad again."

She looked so piteously in Mary's face with her miserable eyes, that Mary felt her heart giving way, and, dreading the weakening of her powers, which the burst of crying she longed for would occasion, hastily changed the subject to Alice; and Jane, in her heart, feeling that there was no sorrow like a mother's sorrow, replied,

"She keeps on much the same, thank you. She's happy, for she knows nought of what's going on; but th' doctor says she grows weaker and weaker. Thou'lt may be like to see her?"

Mary went up-stairs: partly because it is the etiquette in humble life, to offer to friends a last opportunity of seeing the dying or the dead, while the same etiquette forbids a refusal of the invitation; and partly because she longed to breathe, for an instant, the atmosphere of holy calm, which seemed ever to surround the pious good old woman. Alice lay, as before, without pain, or at least any outward expression of it; but totally unconscious of all present circumstances, and absorbed in recollections of the days of her girlhood, which were vivid enough to take the place of realities to her. Still she talked of green fields, and still she spoke to the

long-dead mother and sister, low-lying in their graves this many a year, as if they were with her and about her, in the pleasant places where her youth had passed.

But the voice was fainter, the motions were more languid; she was evidently passing away; but *how* happily!

Mary stood for a time in silence, watching and listening. Then she bent down and reverently kissed Alice's cheek; and drawing Jane Wilson away from the bed, as if the spirit of her who lay there were yet cognizant of present realities, she whispered a few words of hope to the poor mother, and kissing her over and over again in a warm, loving manner, she bade her good-bye, went a few steps, and then once more came back to bid her keep up her heart.

And when she had fairly left the house, Jane Wilson felt as if a sun-beam had ceased shining into the room.

Yet oh! how sorely Mary's heart ached; for more and more the fell certainty came on her that her father was the murderer! She struggled hard not to dwell on this conviction; to think alone on the means of proving Jem's innocence; that was her first duty, and that should be done.

CHAPTER VI.

"And must it then depend on this poor eye
And this unsteady hand, whether the bark,
That bears my all of treasured hope and love,
Shall find a passage through these frowning rocks
To some fair port where peace and safety smile,—
Or whether it shall blindly dash against them,
And miserably sink? Heaven be my help;
And clear my eye, and nerve my trembling hand!"

'THE CONSTANT WOMAN.'

HER heart beating, her head full of ideas, which required time and solitude to be reduced into order, Mary hurried home. She was like one who finds a jewel of which he cannot all at once ascertain the value, but who hides his treasure until some quiet hour when he may ponder over the capabilities its possession unfolds. She was like one who discovers the silken clue which guides to some bower of bliss, and secure of the power within his grasp, has to wait for a time before he may tread the labyrinth.

But no jewel, no bower of bliss was ever so precious to miser or lover as was the belief which now pervaded Mary's mind, that Jem's innocence might be proved, without involving any suspicion of that other—that dear one—so dear, although so criminal—on whose part in

this cruel business she dared not dwell even in thought. For if she did, there arose the awful question,—if all went against Jem the innocent, if judge and jury gave the verdict forth which had the looming gallows in the rear, what ought she to do, possessed of her terrible knowledge? Surely not to inculpate her father—and yet—and yet—she almost prayed for the blessed unconsciousness of death or madness, rather than that awful question should have to be answered by her.

But now a way seemed opening, opening yet more clear. She was thankful she had thought of the *alibi*, and yet more thankful to have so easily obtained the clue to Jem's whereabouts that miserable night. The bright light that her new hope threw over all, seemed also to make her thankful for the early time appointed for the trial. It would be easy to catch Will Wilson on his return from the Isle of Man, which he had planned should be on the Monday; and on the Tuesday all would be made clear—all that she dared to wish to be made clear.

She had still to collect her thoughts and freshen her memory enough to arrange how to meet with Will—for to the chances of a letter she would not trust; to find out his lodgings when in Liverpool; to try and remember the name of the ship in which he was to sail: and the more she considered these points the more difficulty she found there would be in ascertaining these minor but important facts. For you are aware that Alice, whose memory was clear and strong on all points in which her heart was interested, was lying in a manner senseless: that Jane Wilson was (to use her own expression, so expressive to a Lancashire ear) "dazed," that

is to say, bewildered, lost in the confusion of terrifying and distressing thoughts; incapable of concentrating her mind; and at the best of times Will's proceedings were a matter of little importance to her (or so she pretended), she was so jealous of aught which distracted attention from her pearl of price, her only son Jem. So Mary felt hopeless of obtaining any intelligence of the sailor's arrangements from her.

Then, should she apply to Jem himself! But, no! she knew him too well. She felt how thoroughly he must ere now have had it in his power to exculpate himself at another's expense. And his tacit refusal so to do had assured her of what she had never doubted, that the murderer was safe from any impeachment of his. But then neither would he consent, she feared, to any steps which might tend to proving himself innocent. At any rate, she could not consult him. He was removed to Kirkdale, and time pressed. Already it was Saturday at noon. And even if she could have gone to him, I believe she would not. She longed to do all herself; to be his liberator, his deliverer; to win him life, though she might never regain his lost love, by her own exertions. And oh! how could she see him to discuss a subject in which both knew who was the blood-stained man; and yet whose name might not be breathed by either, so dearly with all his faults, his sins, was he loved by both.

All at once when she had ceased to try and remember, the name of Will's ship flashed across her mind.

The *John Cropper*.

He had named it, she had been sure, all along. He

had named it in his conversation with her that last, that fatal Thursday evening. She repeated it over and over again, through a nervous dread of again forgetting it. The *John Cropper*.

And then, as if she were rousing herself out of some strange stupor, she bethought her of Margaret. Who so likely as Margaret to treasure every little particular respecting Will, now Alice was dead to all the stirring purposes of life?

She had gone thus far in her process of thought, when a neighbour stepped in; she with whom they had usually deposited the house-key, when both Mary and her father were absent from home, and who consequently took upon herself to answer all inquiries, and receive all messages which any friends might make, or leave, on finding the house shut up.

"Here's somewhat for you, Mary! A policeman left it."

A bit of parchment.

Many people have a dread of those mysterious pieces of parchment. I am one. Mary was another. Her heart misgave her as she took it, and looked at the unusual appearance of the writing, which, though legible enough, conveyed no idea to her, or rather her mind shut itself up against receiving any idea, which after all was rather a proof she had some suspicion of the meaning that awaited her.

"What is it?" asked she, in a voice from which all the pith and marrow of strength seemed extracted.

"Nay! how should I know? Policeman said he'd

call again towards evening, and see if you'd gotten it. He were loth to leave it, though I telled him who I was, and all about my keeping th' key, and taking messages."

"What is it about?" asked Mary again, in the same hoarse, feeble voice, and turning it over in her fingers, as if she dreaded to inform herself of its meaning.

"Well! yo can read word of writing and I cannot, so it's queer I should have to tell you. But my master says it's a summons for yo to bear witness again Jem Wilson, at th' trial at Liverpool Assize."

"God pity me!" said Mary, faintly, as white as a sheet.

"Nay, wench, never take on so. What yo can say will go little way either to help or to hinder, for folk say he's certain to be hung; and sure enough it was t'other one was your sweetheart."

But Mary was beyond any pang this speech would have given at another time. Her thoughts were all busy picturing to herself the terrible occasion of their next meeting—not as lovers meet should they meet!

"Well!" said the neighbour, seeing no use in remaining with one who noticed her words or her presence so little; "thou'lt tell policeman thou'st getten his precious bit of paper. He seemed to think I should be for keeping it mysel; he's th' first as has ever misdoubted me about giving messages, or notes. Good day."

She left the house, but Mary did not know it. She sat still with the parchment in her hand.

All at once she started up. She would take it to

Job Legh, and ask him to tell her the true meaning, for it could not be *that*.

So she went, and choked out her words of inquiry.

"It's a sub-pœna," he replied, turning the parchment over with the air of a connoisseur; for Job loved hard words, and lawyer-like forms, and even esteemed himself slightly qualified for a lawyer, from the smattering of knowledge he had picked up from an odd volume of Blackstone that he had once purchased at a book-stall.

"A sub-pœna—what is that?" gasped Mary, still in suspense.

Job was struck with her voice, her changed, miserable voice, and peered at her countenance from over his spectacles.

"A sub-pœna is neither more nor less than this, my dear. It's a summonsing you to attend, and answer such questions as may be asked of you regarding the trial of James Wilson, for the murder of Henry Carson; that's the long and short of it, only more elegantly put, for the benefit of them who knows how to value the gift of language. I've been a witness before-time myself; there's nothing much to be afeared on; if they are impudent, why, just you be impudent, and give 'em tit for tat."

"Nothing much to be afeared on!" echoed Mary, but in such a different tone.

"Ay, poor wench, I see how it is. It will go hard with thee a bit, I dare say; but keep up thy heart. Yo cannot have much to tell 'em, that can go either one way or th' other. Nay! may be thou may do him a bit o' good, for when they set eyes on thee, they'll see fast

enough how he came to be so led away by jealousy ; for thou'rt a pretty creature, Mary, and one look at thy face will let 'em into the secret of a young man's madness, and make 'em more ready to pass it over."

"Oh! Job, and won't you ever believe me when I tell you he's innocent ? Indeed, and indeed I can prove it ; he was with Will all the night ; he was, indeed, Job!"

"My wench! whose word hast thou for that?" said Job, pityingly.

"Why! his mother told me, and I'll get Will to bear witness to it. But, oh! Job" (bursting into tears), "it is hard if you won't believe me. How shall I clear him to strangers, when those who know him, and ought to love him, are so set against his being innocent."

"God knows, I'm not against his being innocent," said Job, solemnly. "I'd give half my remaining days on earth,—I'd give them all, Mary (and but for the love I bear to my poor blind girl, they'd be no great gift), if I could save him. You've thought me hard, Mary, but I'm not hard at bottom, and I'll help you if I can; that I will, right or wrong," he added; but in a low voice, and coughed the uncertain words away the moment afterwards.

"Oh, Job ! if you will help me," exclaimed Mary, brightening up (though it was but a wintry gleam after all), "tell me what to say, when they question me ; I shall be so gloppened,* I shall not know what to answer."

* "Gloppened," terrified.

"Thou canst do nought better than tell the truth. Truth's best at all times, they say ; and for sure it is when folk have to do with lawyers ; for they're 'cute and cunning enough to get it out sooner or later, and it makes folk look like Tom Noddies, when truth follows falsehood, against their will."

"But I don't know the truth ; I mean—I can't say rightly what I mean ; but I'm sure, if I were pent up, and stared at by hundreds of folk, and asked ever so simple a question, I should be for answering it wrong ; if they asked me if I had seen you on a Saturday, or a Tuesday, or any day, I should have clean forgotten all about it, and say the very thing I should not."

"Well, well, don't go for to get such notions into your head ; they're what they call 'narvous,' and talking on 'em does no good. Here's Margaret! bless the wench! Look, Mary, how well she guides hersel."

Job fell to watching his grand-daughter, as with balancing, measured steps, timed almost as if to music, she made her way across the street.

Mary shrank as if from a cold blast—shrank from Margaret! The blind girl, with her reserve, her silence, seemed to be a severe judge ; she, listening, would be such a check to the trusting earnestness of confidence, which was beginning to unlock the sympathy of Job. Mary knew herself to blame ; felt her errors in every fibre of her heart ; but yet she would rather have had them spoken about, even in terms of severest censure, than have been treated in the icy

manner in which Margaret had received her that morning.

"Here's Mary," said Job, almost as if he wished to propitiate his grand-daughter, "come to take a bit of dinner with us, for I'll warrant she has never thought of cooking any for herself to-day; and she looks as wan and pale as a ghost."

It was calling out the feeling of hospitality, so strong and warm in most of those who have little to offer, but whose heart goes eagerly and kindly with that little. Margaret came towards Mary with a welcoming gesture, and a kinder manner by far than she had used in the morning.

"Nay, Mary, thou know'st thou'st getten nought at home," urged Job.

And Mary, faint and weary, and with a heart too aching-full of other matters to be pertinacious in this, withdrew her refusal.

They ate their dinner quietly; for to all it was an effort to speak, and after one or two attempts they had subsided into silence.

When the meal was ended Job began again on the subject they all had at heart.

"Yon poor lad at Kirkdale will want a lawyer to see they don't put on him, but do him justice. Hast thought of that?"

Mary had not, and felt sure his mother had not.

Margaret confirmed this last supposition.

"I have but just been there, and poor Jane is like one dateless; so many griefs come on her at once. One time she seems to make sure he'll be hung; and

if I took her in that way, she flew out (poor body!) and said, that in spite of what folk said, there were them as could, and would prove him guiltless. So I never knew where to have her. The only thing she was constant in, was declaring him innocent."

"Mother-like!" said Job.

"She meant Will, when she spoke of them that could prove him innocent. He was with Will on Thursday night; walking a part of the way with him to Liverpool; now the thing is to lay hold on Will, and get him to prove this." So spoke Mary, calm, from the earnestness of her purpose.

"Don't build too much on it, my dear," said Job.

"I do build on it," replied Mary, "because I know it's the truth, and I mean to try and prove it, come what may. Nothing you can say will daunt me, Job, so don't you go and try. You may help, but you cannot hinder me doing what I'm resolved on."

They respected her firmness of determination, and Job almost gave into her belief, when he saw how steadfastly she was acting upon it. Oh! surest way of conversion to our faith, whatever it may be,—regarding either small things, or great,—when it is beheld as the actuating principle, from which we never swerve! When it is seen that, instead of over-much profession, it is worked into the life, and moves every action!

Mary gained courage as she instinctively felt she had made way with one at least of her companions.

"Now I'm clear about this much," she continued, "he was with Will when the —— shot was fired (she could not bring herself to say, when the murder was

committed, when she remembered *who* it was that, she had every reason to believe, was the taker-away of life). Will can prove this. I must find Will. He was not to sail till Tuesday. There is time enough. He was to come back from his uncle's, in the Isle of Man, on Monday. I must meet him in Liverpool, on that day, and tell him what has happened, and how poor Jem is in trouble, and that he must prove an *alibi*, come Tuesday. All this I can and will do, though perhaps I don't clearly know how, just at present. But surely God will help me. When I know I'm doing right, I will have no fear, but put my trust in Him ; for I'm acting for the innocent and good, and not for my own self, who have done so wrong. I have no fear when I think of Jem, who is so good."

She stopped, oppressed with the fulness of her heart. Margaret began to love her again ; to see in her the same, sweet, faulty, impulsive, lovable creature she had known in the former Mary Barton, but with more of dignity, self-reliance, and purpose.

Mary spoke again.

"Now I know the name of Will's vessel—the *John Cropper ;* and I know that she is bound to America. That is something to know. But I forget, if I ever heard, where he lodges in Liverpool. He spoke of his landlady, as a good, trustworthy woman ; but if he named her name, it has slipped my memory. Can you help me, Margaret ?"

She appealed to her friend calmly and openly : as if perfectly aware of, and recognising the unspoken tie

which bound her and Will together; she asked her in the same manner in which she would have asked a wife where her husband dwelt. And Margaret replied in the like calm tone, two spots of crimson on her cheeks alone bearing witness to any internal agitation.

"He lodges at a Mrs. Jones's, Milk-House Yard, out of Nicholas Street. He has lodged there ever since he began to go to sea; she is a very decent kind of woman, I believe."

"Well, Mary! I'll give you my prayers," said Job. "It's not often I pray regular, though I often speak a word to God, when I'm either very happy, or very sorry; I've catched myself thanking him at odd hours, when I've found a rare insect, or had a fine day for an out; but I cannot help it, no more than I can talking to a friend. But this time I'll pray regular for Jem, and for you. And so will Margaret, I'll be bound. Still, wench! what think yo of a lawyer? I know one, Mr. Cheshire, who is rather given to th' insect line—and a good kind o' chap. He and I have swopped specimens many's the time, when either of us had a duplicate. He'll do me a kind turn, I'm sure. I'll just take my hat, and pay him a visit."

No sooner said, than done.

Margaret and Mary were left alone. And this seemed to bring back the feeling of awkwardness, not to say estrangement.

But Mary, excited to an unusual pitch of courage, was the first to break silence.

"Oh, Margaret!" said she, "I see—I feel how

wrong you think I have acted ; you cannot think me worse than I think myself, now my eyes are opened." Here her sobs came choking up her voice.

"Nay," Margaret began, "I have no right to—"

"Yes, Margaret, you have a right to judge; you cannot help it; only in your judgment remember mercy, as the Bible says. You, who have been always good, cannot tell how easy it is at first to go a little wrong, and then how hard it is to go back. Oh! I little thought when I was first pleased with Mr. Carson's speeches, how it would all end ; perhaps in the death of him I love better than life."

She burst into a passion of tears. The feelings pent up through the day would have vent. But checking herself with a strong effort, and looking up at Margaret as piteously as if those calm, strong eyes could see her imploring face, she added,

"I must not cry ; I must not give way ; there will be time enough for that, hereafter, if—I only wanted you to speak kindly to me, Margaret, for I am very, very wretched ; more wretched than any one can ever know ; more wretched, I sometimes fancy, than I have deserved,—but that is wrong, is not it, Margaret? Oh! I have done wrong, and I am punished ; you cannot tell how much."

Who could resist her voice, her tones of misery, of humility? Who would refuse the kindness for which she begged so penitently? Not Margaret. The old friendly manner came back. With it, may be, more of tenderness.

"Oh! Margaret, do you think he can be saved; do you think they can find him guilty if Will comes forward as a witness? Won't that be a good *alibi?*"

Margaret did not answer for a moment.

"Oh, speak! Margaret," said Mary, with anxious impatience.

"I know nought about law, or *alibis*," replied Margaret, meekly; "but, Mary, as grandfather says, aren't you building too much on what Jane Wilson has told you about his going with Will? Poor soul, she's gone dateless, I think, with care, and watching, and overmuch trouble; and who can wonder? Or Jem may have told her he was going, by way of a blind."

"You don't know Jem," said Mary, starting from her seat in a hurried manner, "or you would not say so."

"I hope I may be wrong; but think, Mary, how much there is against him. The shot was fired with his gun; he it was as threatened Mr. Carson not many days before; he was absent from home at that very time, as we know, and, as I'm much afeared, some one will be called on to prove; and there's no one else to share suspicion with him."

Mary heaved a deep sigh.

"But, Margaret, he did not do it," Mary again asserted.

Margaret looked unconvinced.

"I can do no good, I see, by saying so, for none on you believe me, and I won't say so again till I can prove it. Monday morning I'll go to Liverpool. I shall be at hand for the trial. Oh dear! dear! And I will

find Will; and then, Margaret, I think you'll be sorry for being so stubborn about Jem."

"Don't fly off, dear Mary, I'd give a deal to be wrong. And now I'm going to be plain spoken. You'll want money. Them lawyers is no better than a spunge for sucking up money; let alone your hunting out Will, and your keep in Liverpool, and what not. You must take some of the mint I've got laid by in the old tea-pot. You have no right to refuse, for I offer it to Jem, not to you; it's for his purposes you're to use it."

"I know—I see. Thank you, Margaret; you're a kind one, at any rate. I take it for Jem; and I'll do my very best with it for him. Not all, though; don't think I'll take all. They'll pay me for my keep. I'll take this," accepting a sovereign from the hoard which Margaret produced out of its accustomed place in the cupboard. "Your grandfather will pay the lawyer. I'll have nought to do with him," shuddering as she remembered Job's words, about lawyers' skill in always discovering the truth, sooner or later; and knowing what was the secret she had to hide.

"Bless you! don't make such ado about it," said Margaret, cutting short Mary's thanks. "I sometimes think there's two sides to the commandment; and that we may say, 'Let others do unto you, as you would do unto them,' for pride often prevents our giving others a great deal of pleasure, in not letting them be kind, when their hearts are longing to help; and when we ourselves should wish to do just the same, if we were in their place. Oh! how often I've been hurt, by being coldly told by per-

sons not to trouble myself about their care, or sorrow, when I saw them in great grief, and wanted to be of comfort. Our Lord Jesus was not above letting folk minister to Him, for he knew how happy it makes one to do aught for another. It's the happiest work on earth."

Mary had been too much engrossed by watching what was passing in the street to attend very closely to that which Margaret was saying. From her seat she could see out of the window pretty plainly, and she caught sight of a gentleman walking alongside of Job, evidently in earnest conversation with him, and looking keen and penetrating enough to be a lawyer. Job was laying down something to be attended to she could see, by his up-lifted fore-finger, and his whole gesture; then he pointed and nodded across the street to his own house, as if inducing his companion to come in. Mary dreaded lest he should; and she be subjected to a closer cross-examination than she had hitherto undergone, as to why she was so certain that Jem was innocent. She feared he was coming; he stepped a little towards the spot. No! it was only to make way for a child, tottering along, whom Mary had overlooked. Now Job took him by the button, so earnestly familiar had he grown. The gentleman looked "fidging fain" to be gone, but submitted in a manner that made Mary like him in spite of his profession. Then came a volley of last words, answered by briefest nods, and monosyllables; and then the stranger went off with redoubled quickness of pace, and Job crossed the street with a little satisfied air of importance on his kindly face.

"Well! Mary," said he, on entering, "I've seen the lawyer, not Mr. Cheshire though; trials for murder, it seems, are not his line o' business. But he gived me a note to another 'torney; a fine fellow enough, only too much of a talker; I could hardly get a word in, he cut me so short. However, I've just been going over the principal points again to him; may be you saw us? I wanted him just come over and speak to you himsel, Mary, but he was pressed for time; and he said your evidence would not be much either here or there. He's going to the 'sizes first train on Monday morning, and will see Jem, and hear the ins and outs from him, and he's gived me his address, Mary, and you and Will are to call on him (Will 'special) on Monday, at two o'clock. Thou'rt taking it in, Mary; thou'rt to call on him in Liverpool at two, Monday afternoon?"

Job had reason to doubt if she fully understood him; for all this minuteness of detail, these satisfactory arrangements, as he considered them, only seemed to bring the circumstances in which she was placed more vividly home to Mary. They convinced her that it was real, and not all a dream, as she had sunk into fancying it for a few minutes, while sitting in the old accustomed place, her body enjoying the rest, and her frame sustained by food, and listening to Margaret's calm voice. The gentleman she had just beheld would see and question Jem in a few hours, and what would be the result?

Monday: that was the day after to-morrow, and on Tuesday, life and death would be tremendous realities

to her lover; or else death would be an awful certainty to her father.

No wonder Job went over his main points again:—

"Monday; at two o'clock mind; and here's his card. 'Mr. Bridgenorth, 41, Renshaw Street, Liverpool.' He'll be lodging there."

Job ceased talking, and the silence roused Mary up to thank him.

"You're very kind, Job; very. You and Margaret won't desert me, come what will."

"Pooh! pooh! wench; don't lose heart, just as I'm beginning to get it. He seems to think a deal on Will's evidence. You're sure, girls, you're under no mistake about Will?"

"I'm sure," said Mary, "he went straight from here, purposing to go see his uncle at the Isle of Man, and be back Sunday night, ready for the ship sailing on Tuesday."

"So am I," said Margaret. "And the ship's name was the *John Cropper*, and he lodged where I told Mary before. Have you got it down, Mary?" Mary wrote it on the back of Mr. Bridgenorth's card.

"He was not over-willing to go," said she, as she wrote, "for he knew little about his uncle, and said he didn't care if he never knowed more. But he said kinsfolk was kinsfolk, and promises was promises, so he'd go for a day or so, and then it would be over."

Margaret had to go and practise some singing in town; so, though loth to depart and be alone, Mary bade her friends good-bye.

CHAPTER VII.

"O sad and solemn is the trembling watch
Of those who sit and count the heavy hours,
Beside the fevered sleep of one they love!
O awful is it in the hushed mid night,
While gazing on the pallid, moveless form,
To start and ask, 'Is it now sleep—or death?'"

ANONYMOUS.

MARY could not be patient in her loneliness; so much painful thought weighed on her mind; the very house was haunted with memories, and foreshadowings.

Having performed all duties to Jem, as far as her weak powers, yet loving heart could act; and a black veil being drawn over her father's past, present, and future life, beyond which she could not penetrate to judge of any filial service she ought to render; her mind unconsciously sought after some course of action in which she might engage. Any thing, any thing, rather than leisure for reflection.

And then came up the old feeling which first bound Ruth to Naomi; the love they both held towards one object; and Mary felt that her cares would be most lightened by being of use, or of comfort to his mother.

So she once more locked up the house, and set off towards Ancoats; rushing along with down-cast head, for fear lest any one should recognise her and arrest her progress.

Jane Wilson sat quietly in her chair as Mary entered; so quietly, as to strike one by the contrast it presented to her usual bustling, and nervous manner.

She looked very pale and wan; but the quietness was the thing that struck Mary most. She did not rise as Mary came in, but sat still and said something in so gentle, so feeble a voice, that Mary did not catch it.

Mrs. Davenport, who was there, plucked Mary by the gown, and whispered,

"Never heed her; she's worn out, and best let alone. I'll tell you all about it, up-stairs."

But Mary, touched by the anxious look with which Mrs. Wilson gazed at her, as if awaiting the answer to some question, went forward to listen to the speech she was again repeating.

"What is this? will you tell me?"

Then Mary looked, and saw another ominous slip of parchment in the mother's hand, which she was rolling up and down in a tremulous manner between her fingers.

Mary's heart sickened within her; and she could not speak.

"What is it?" she repeated. "Will you tell me?"

She still looked at Mary, with the same child-like gaze of wonder and patient entreaty.

What could she answer?

"I telled ye not to heed her," said Mrs. Davenport, a little angrily. "She knows well enough what it is,—too well, belike. I was not in when they sarved it; but Mrs. Heming (her as lives next door) was, and she spelled out the meaning, and made it all clear to Mrs. Wilson. It's a summons to be a witness on Jem's trial—Mrs. Heming thinks, to swear to the gun; for, yo see, there's nobbut* her as can testify to its being his, and she let on so easily to the policeman that it was his, that there's no getting off her word now. Poor body; she takes it very hard, I dare say!"

Mrs. Wilson had waited patiently while this whispered speech was being uttered, imagining, perhaps, that it would end in some explanation addressed to her. But when both were silent, though their eyes, without speech, or language, told their heart's pity, she spoke again, in the same unaltered gentle voice (so different from the irritable impatience she had been ever apt to show to every one except her husband,—he who had wedded her, broken-down and injured)—in a voice so different, I say, from the old, hasty manner, she spoke now the same anxious words,

"What is this? Will you tell me?"

"Yo'd better give it me at once, Mrs. Wilson, and let me put it out of your sight.—Speak to her, Mary, wench, and ask for a sight on it; I've tried, and better-tried to get it from her, and she takes no heed of words, and I'm loth to pull it by force out of her hands."

* "Nobbut," none-but. "No man sigh evere God *no but* the oon bigetun sone."—*Wiclif's Version.*

Mary drew the little "cricket"* out from under the dresser, and sat down at Mrs. Wilson's knee, and, coaxing one of her tremulous, ever moving hands into hers, began to rub it soothingly; there was a little resistance—a very little, but that was all; and presently, in the nervous movement of the imprisoned hand, the parchment fell to the ground.

Mary, calmly, and openly, picked it up without any attempt at concealment, and quietly placing it in sight of the anxious eyes that followed it with a kind of spell-bound dread, went on with her soothing caresses.

"She has had no sleep for many nights," said the girl to Mrs. Davenport, "and all this woe and sorrow, —it's no wonder."

"No, indeed!" Mrs. Davenport answered.

"We must get her fairly to bed; we must get her undressed, and all; and trust to God, in His mercy, to send her to sleep, or else,—"

For, you see, they spoke before her as if she were not there; her heart was so far away.

Accordingly they almost lifted her from the chair in which she sat motionless, and taking her up as gently as a mother carries her sleeping baby, they undressed her poor, worn form, and laid her in the little bed up-stairs. They had once thought of placing her in Jem's bed, to be out of sight or sound of any disturbance of Alice's, but then again they remembered the shock she might receive in awakening in so unusual a place, and also that Mary, who intended to keep vigil that night in

* "Cricket," a stool.

the house of mourning, would find it difficult to divide her attention in the possible cases that might ensue.

So they laid her, as I said before, on that little pallet-bed; and, as they were slowly withdrawing from the bed-side, hoping and praying that she might sleep, and forget for a time her heavy burden, she looked wistfully after Mary, and whispered,

"You have not told me what it is. What is it?"

And gazing in her face for the expected answer, her eye-lids slowly closed, and she fell into a deep, heavy sleep, almost as profound a rest as death.

Mrs. Davenport went her way, and Mary was alone,—for I cannot call those who sleep allies, against the agony of thought which solitude sometimes brings up.

She dreaded the night before her. Alice might die; the doctor had that day declared her case hopeless, and not far from death; and at times the terror, so natural to the young, not of death, but of the remains of the dead, came over Mary; and she bent and listened anxiously for the long-drawn, pausing breath of the sleeping Alice.

Or Mrs. Wilson might awake in a state which Mary dreaded to anticipate, and anticipated while she dreaded;—in a state of complete delirium. Already her senses had been severely stunned by the full explanation of what was required of her,—of what she had to prove against her son, her Jem, her only child,—which Mary could not doubt the officious Mrs. Heming had given; and what if in dreams (that land into which no sympathy nor love can penetrate with another, either to share its

bliss or its agony,—that land whose scenes are unspeakable terrors, are hidden mysteries, are priceless treasures to one alone,—that land where alone I may see, while yet I tarry here, the sweet looks of my dead child),—what if, in the horrors of her dreams, her brain should go still more astray, and she should waken crazy with her visions, and the terrible reality that begot them ?

How much worse is anticipation sometimes than reality ! How Mary dreaded that night, and how calmly it passed by ! Even more so than if Mary had not had such claims upon her care !

Anxiety about them deadened her own peculiar anxieties. She thought of the sleepers whom she was watching, till overpowered herself by the want of rest, she fell off into short slumbers in which the night wore imperceptibly away. To be sure Alice spoke, and sang, during her waking moments, like the child she deemed herself ; but so happily with the dearly-loved ones around her, with the scent of the heather, and the song of the wild bird hovering about her in imagination—with old scraps of ballads, or old snatches of primitive versions of the Psalms (such as are sung in country churches half draperied over with ivy, and where the running brook, or the murmuring wind among the trees makes fit accompaniment to the chorus of human voices uttering praise and thanksgiving to their God)—that the speech and the song gave comfort and good cheer to the listener's heart, and the gray dawn began to dim the light of the rush-candle, before Mary thought it possible that day was already trembling on the horizon.

Then she got up from the chair where she had been dozing, and went, half-asleep, to the window to assure herself that morning was at hand. The streets were unusually quiet with a Sabbath stillness. No factory bells that morning; no early workmen going to their labours; no slip-shod girls cleaning the windows of the little shops which broke the monotony of the street; instead, you might see here and there some operative sallying forth for a breath of country air, or some father leading out his wee toddling bairns for the unwonted pleasure of a walk with "Daddy," in the clear frosty morning. Men with more leisure on week-days would perhaps have walked quicker than they did through the fresh sharp air of this Sunday morning; but to them there was a pleasure, an absolute refreshment in the dawdling gait they, one and all of them, had.

To be sure, there were one or two passengers on that morning whose objects were less innocent and less praiseworthy than those of the people I have already mentioned, and whose animal state of mind and body clashed jarringly on the peacefulness of the day; but upon them I will not dwell; as you and I, and almost every one, I think, may send up our individual cry of self-reproach that we have not done all that we could for the stray and wandering ones of our brethren.

When Mary turned from the window, she went to the bed of each sleeper, to look and listen. Alice looked perfectly quiet and happy in her slumber, and her face seemed to have become much more youthful during her painless approach to death.

Mrs. Wilson's countenance was stamped with the anxiety of the last few days, although she, too, appeared sleeping soundly; but as Mary gazed on her, trying to trace a likeness to her son in her face, she awoke and looked up into Mary's eyes, while the expression of consciousness came back into her own.

Both were silent for a minute or two. Mary's eyes had fallen beneath that penetrating gaze, in which the agony of memory seemed every moment to find fuller vent.

"Is it a dream?" the mother asked at last in a low voice.

"No!" replied Mary, in the same tone.

Mrs. Wilson hid her face in the pillow.

She was fully conscious of every thing this morning; it was evident that the stunning effect of the subpœna, which had affected her so much last night in her weak, worn-out state, had passed away. Mary offered no opposition when she indicated by languid gesture and action that she wished to rise. A sleepless bed is a haunted place.

When she was dressed with Mary's help, she stood by Alice for a minute or two, looking at the slumberer.

"How happy she is!" said she, quietly and sadly.

All the time that Mary was getting breakfast ready, and performing every other little domestic office she could think of, to add to the comfort of Jem's mother, Mrs. Wilson sat still in the arm-chair, watching her silently. Her old irritation of temper and manner seemed to have suddenly disappeared, or perhaps she was too depressed in body and mind to show it.

Mary told her all that had been done with regard to Mr. Bridgenorth; all her own plans for seeking out Will; all her hopes; and concealed as well as she could all the doubts and fears that would rise unbidden. To this Mrs. Wilson listened without much remark, but with deep interest and perfect comprehension. When Mary ceased she sighed and said, "Oh wench! I am his mother, and yet I do so little, I can do so little! That's what frets me! I seem like a child as sees its mammy ill, and moans and cries its little heart out, yet does nought to help. I think my sense has left me all at once, and I can't even find strength to cry like the little child."

Hereupon she broke into a feeble wail of self-reproach, that her outward show of misery was not greater; as if any cries, or tears, or loud-spoken words could have told of such pangs at the heart as that look, and that thin, piping, altered voice!

But think of Mary and what she was enduring! Picture to yourself (for I cannot tell you) the armies of thoughts that met and clashed in her brain; and then imagine the effort it cost her to be calm, and quiet, and even, in a faint way, cheerful and smiling at times.

After a while she began to stir about in her own mind for some means of sparing the poor mother the trial of appearing as a witness in the matter of the gun. They had made no allusion to her summons this morning, and Mary almost thought she must have forgotten it; and surely some means might be found to prevent that additional sorrow. She must see Job about it; nay, if necessary, she must see Mr. Bridgenorth, with all his

truth-compelling powers ; for, indeed, she had so struggled and triumphed (though a sadly-bleeding victor at heart) over herself these two last days, had so concealed agony, and hidden her inward woe and bewilderment, that she began to take confidence, and to have faith in her own powers of meeting any one with a passably fair show, whatever might be rending her life beneath the cloak of her deception.

Accordingly, as soon as Mrs. Davenport came in after morning church, to ask after the two lone women, and she had heard the report Mary had to give (so much better as regarded Mrs. Wilson than what they had feared the night before it would have been)—as soon as this kind-hearted, grateful woman came in, Mary, telling her her purpose, went off to fetch the doctor who attended Alice.

He was shaking himself after his morning's round, and happy in the anticipation of his Sunday's dinner ; but he was a good-tempered man, who found it difficult to keep down his jovial easiness even by the bed of sickness or death. He had mischosen his profession ; for it was his delight to see every one around him in full enjoyment of life.

However, he subdued his face to the proper expression of sympathy, befitting a doctor listening to a patient, or a patient's friend (and Mary's sad, pale, anxious face, might be taken for either the one, or the other).

"Well, my girl! and what brings you here ?" said he, as he entered his surgery. "Not on your own account, I hope."

"I wanted you to come and see Alice Wilson,—and then I thought you would may be take a look at Mrs. Wilson."

He bustled on his hat and coat, and followed Mary, instantly.

After shaking his head over Alice (as if it was a mournful thing for one so pure and good, so true, although so humble a Christian, to be nearing her desired haven), and muttering the accustomed words intended to destroy hope, and prepare anticipation, he went in compliance with Mary's look to ask the usual questions of Mrs. Wilson, who sat passively in her arm-chair.

She answered his questions, and submitted to his examination.

"How do you think her?" asked Mary, eagerly.

"Why—a," began he, perceiving that he was desired to take one side in his answer, and unable to find out whether his listener was anxious for a favourable verdict or otherwise; but thinking it most probable that she would desire the former, he continued,

"She is weak, certainly; the natural result of such a shock as the arrest of her son would be,—for I understand this James Wilson, who murdered Mr. Carson, was her son. Sad thing to have such a reprobate in the family."

"You say '*who murdered,*' sir!" said Mary, indignantly. "He is only taken up on suspicion, and many have no doubt of his innocence—those who know him, sir."

"Ah, well, well! doctors have seldom time to read newspapers, and I dare say I'm not very correct in my story. I dare say he's innocent; I'm sure I had no right to say otherwise,—only words slip out.—No! indeed, young woman, I see no cause for apprehension about this poor creature in the next room;—weak—certainly; but a day or two's good nursing will set her up, and I'm sure you're a good nurse, my dear, from your pretty, kind-hearted face,—I'll send a couple of pills and a draught, but don't alarm yourself,—there's no occasion, I assure you."

"But you don't think her fit to go to Liverpool?" asked Mary, still in the anxious tone of one who wishes earnestly for some particular decision.

"To Liverpool—yes," replied he. "A short journey like that could not fatigue, and might distract her thoughts. Let her go by all means,—it would be the very thing for her."

"Oh, sir!" burst out Mary, almost sobbing; "I did so hope you would say she was too ill to go."

"Whew—" said he, with a prolonged whistle, trying to understand the case, but, being, as he said, no reader of newspapers, utterly unaware of the peculiar reasons there might be for so apparently unfeeling a wish,—"Why did you not tell me so sooner? It might certainly do her harm in her weak state; there is always some risk attending journeys—draughts, and what not. To her, they might prove very injurious,—very. I disapprove of journeys, or excitement, in all cases where the patient is in the low, fluttered state

in which Mrs. Wilson is. If you take *my* advice, you will certainly put a stop to all thoughts of going to Liverpool." He really had completely changed his opinion, though quite unconsciously; so desirous was he to comply with the wishes of others.

"Oh, sir, thank you! And will you give me a certificate of her being unable to go, if the lawyer says we must have one? The lawyer, you know," continued she, seeing him look puzzled, "who is to defend Jem,—it was a witness against him—"

"My dear girl!" said he, almost angrily, "why did you not state the case fully at first? one minute would have done it,—and my dinner waiting all this time. To be sure she can't go,—it would be madness to think of it; if her evidence could have done good, it would have been a different thing. Come to me for the certificate any time; that is to say, if the lawyer advises you. I second the lawyer; take counsel with both the learned professions—ha, ha, ha,—"

And laughing at his own joke, he departed, leaving Mary, accusing herself of stupidity in having imagined that every one was as well acquainted with the facts concerning the trial as she was herself; for indeed she had never doubted that the doctor would have been aware of the purpose of poor Mrs. Wilson's journey to Liverpool.

Presently she went to Job (the ever-ready Mrs. Davenport keeping watch over the two old women), and told him her fears, her plans, and her proceedings.

To her surprise he shook his head, doubtfully.

"It may have an awkward look, if we keep her back. Lawyers is up to tricks."

"But it's no trick," said Mary. "She is so poorly, she was last night, at least; and to-day she's so faded and weak."

"Poor soul! I dare say. I only mean for Jem's sake; as so much is known, it won't do now to hang back. But I'll ask Mr. Bridgenorth. I'll e'en take your doctor's advice. Yo tarry at home, and I'll come to yo in an hour's time. Go your ways, wench."

CHAPTER VIII.

" Something there was, what, none presumed to say,
Clouds lightly passing on a smiling day,—
Whispers and hints which went from ear to ear,
And mixed reports no judge on earth could clear."

CRABBE.

" Curious conjectures he may always make,
And either side of dubious questions take."

IB.

MARY went home. Oh! how her head did ache, and how dizzy her brain was growing! But there would be time enough she felt for giving way, hereafter.

So she sat quiet and still by an effort; sitting near the window, and looking out of it, but seeing nothing, when all at once she caught sight of something which roused her up, and made her draw back.

But it was too late. She had been seen.

Sally Leadbitter flaunted into the little dingy room, making it gaudy with the Sunday excess of colouring in her dress.

She was really curious to see Mary; her connexion with a murderer seemed to have made her into a sort

of *lusus naturæ*, and was almost, by some, expected to have made a change in her personal appearance, so earnestly did they stare at her. But Mary had been too much absorbed this last day or two to notice this.

Now Sally had a grand view, and looked her over and over (a very different thing from looking her through and through), and almost learnt her off by heart;—"her every-day gown (Hoyle's print you know, that lilac thing with the high body) she was so fond of; a little black silk handkerchief just knotted round her neck, like a boy; her hair all taken back from her face, as if she wanted to keep her head cool—she would always keep that hair of hers so long; and her hands twitching continually about.—"

Such particulars would make Sally into a Gazette Extraordinary the next morning at the work-room, and were worth coming for, even if little else could be extracted from Mary.

"Why, Mary!" she began. "Where have you hidden yourself? You never showed your face all yesterday at Miss Simmonds'. You don't fancy we think any the worse of you for what's come and gone. Some on us, indeed, were a bit sorry for the poor young man, as lies stiff and cold for your sake, Mary; but we shall ne'er cast it up against you. Miss Simmonds too will be mighty put out if you don't come, for there's a deal of mourning, agait."

"I can't," Mary said, in a low voice. "I don't mean ever to come again."

"Why, Mary!" said Sally, in unfeigned surprise.

"To be sure you'll have to be in Liverpool, Tuesday, and may be Wednesday; but after that you'll surely come, and tell us all about it. Miss Simmonds knows you'll have to be off those two days. But between you and me, she's a bit of a gossip, and will like hearing all how and about the trial, well enough to let you off very easy for your being absent a day or two. Besides, Betsy Morgan was saying yesterday, she should not wonder but you'd prove quite an attraction to customers. Many a one would come and have their gowns made by Miss Simmonds just to catch a glimpse at you, at after the trial's over. Really, Mary, you'll turn out quite a heroine."

The little fingers twitched worse than ever; the large soft eyes looked up pleadingly into Sally's face; but she went on in the same strain, not from any unkind or cruel feeling towards Mary, but solely because she was incapable of comprehending her suffering.

She had been shocked, of course, at Mr. Carson's death, though at the same time the excitement was rather pleasant than otherwise; and dearly now would she have enjoyed the conspicuous notice which Mary was sure to receive.

"How shall you like being cross-examined, Mary?"

"Not at all," answered Mary, when she found she must answer.

"La! what impudent fellows those lawyers are! And their clerks, too, not a bit better. I should not wonder" (in a comforting tone, and really believing she was giving comfort) "if you picked up a new sweet-

heart in Liverpool. What gown are you going in, Mary?"

"Oh, I don't know and don't care," exclaimed Mary, sick and weary of her visitor.

"Well, then! take my advice, and go in that blue merino. It's old to be sure, and a bit worn at elbows, but folk won't notice that, and th' colour suits you. Now mind, Mary. And I'll lend you my black watered scarf," added she, really good-naturedly, according to her sense of things, and withal, a little bit pleased at the idea of her pet article of dress figuring away on the person of a witness at a trial for murder.

"I'll bring it to-morrow before you start."

"No, don't!" said Mary; "thank you, but I don't want it."

"Why, what can you wear? I know all your clothes as well as I do my own, and what is there you can wear? Not your old plaid shawl, I do hope? You would not fancy this I have on, more nor the scarf, would you?" said she, brightening up at the thought, and willing to lend it, or any thing else.

"Oh Sally! don't go on talking a-that-ns; how can I think on dress at such a time? When it's a matter of life and death to Jem?"

"Bless the girl! It's Jem, is it? Well, now I thought there was some sweetheart in the back-ground, when you flew off so with Mr. Carson. Then what in the name of goodness made him shoot Mr. Harry? After you had given up going with him, I mean? Was he afraid you'd be on again."

"How dare you say he shot Mr. Harry?" asked Mary, firing up from the state of languid indifference into which she had sunk while Sally had been settling about her dress. "But it's no matter what you think, as did not know him. What grieves me is that people should go on thinking him guilty as did know him," she said, sinking back into her former depressed tone and manner.

"And don't you think he did it?" asked Sally.

Mary paused; she was going on too fast with one so curious and so unscrupulous. Besides she remembered how even she herself had, at first, believed him guilty; and she felt it was not for her to cast stones at those who, on similar evidence, inclined to the same belief. None had given him much benefit of a doubt. None had faith in his innocence. None but his mother; and there the heart loved more than the head reasoned, and her yearning affection had never for an instant entertained the idea that her Jem was a murderer. But Mary disliked the whole conversation; the subject, the manner in which it was treated, were all painful, and she had a repugnance to the person with whom she spoke.

She was thankful, therefore, when Job Legh's voice was heard at the door, as he stood with the latch in his hand, talking to a neighbour, and when Sally jumped up in vexation and said, "There's that old fogey coming in here as I'm alive! Did your father set him to look after you while he was away? or what brings the old chap here? However, I'm off; I never could abide

either him or his prim grand-daughter. Goodbye, Mary."

So far in a whisper, then louder,

"If you think better of my offer about the scarf, Mary, just step in to-morrow before nine, and you're quite welcome to it."

She and Job passed each other at the door, with mutual looks of dislike, which neither took any pains to conceal.

"Yon's a bold, bad girl," said Job to Mary.

"She's very good-natured," replied Mary, too honourable to abuse a visitor who had only that instant crossed her threshold, and gladly dwelling on the good quality most apparent in Sally's character.

"Ay, ay! good-natured, generous, jolly, full of fun; there are a number of other names for the good qualities the devil leaves his childer, as baits to catch gudgeons with. D'ye think folk could be led astray by one who was every way bad? Howe'er, that's not what I came to talk about. I've seen Mr. Bridgenorth, and he is in a manner of the same mind as me; he thinks it would have an awkward look, and might tell against the poor lad on his trial; still if she's ill she's ill, and it can't be helped."

"I don't know if she's so bad as all that," said Mary, who began to dread her part in doing any thing which might tell against her poor lover.

"Will you come and see her, Job; the doctor seemed to say as I liked, not as he thought?"

"That's because he had no great thought on the

subject, either one way or t'other," replied Job, whose contempt for medical men pretty nearly equalled his respect for lawyers. "But I'll go and welcome. I han not seen th' oud ladies since their sorrows, and it's but manners to go and ax after them. Come along."

The room at Mrs. Wilson's had that still, changeless look you must have often observed in the house of sickness or mourning. No particular employment going on; people watching and waiting rather than acting, unless in the more sudden and violent attacks; what little movement is going on, so noiseless and hushed; the furniture all arranged and stationary, with a view to the comfort of the afflicted; the window-blinds drawn down, to keep out the disturbing variety of a sun-beam; the same saddened, serious look on the faces of the in-dwellers; you fall back into the same train of thought with all these associations, and forget the street, the outer world, in the contemplation of the one stationary, absorbing interest within.

Mrs. Wilson sat quietly in her chair, with just the same look Mary had left on her face; Mrs. Davenport went about with creaking shoes, which made all the more noise from her careful and lengthened tread, annoying the ears of those who were well, in this instance, far more than the dulled senses of the sick and the sorrowful. Alice's voice still was going on cheerfully in the upper room, with incessant talking and little laughs to herself, or perhaps in sympathy with her unseen companions; "unseen," I say, in preference to "fancied,"

for who knows whether God does not permit the forms of those who were dearest when living, to hover round the bed of the dying?

Job spoke, and Mrs. Wilson answered.

So quietly, that it was unnatural under the circumstances. It made a deeper impression on the old man than any token of mere bodily illness could have done. If she had raved in delirium, or moaned in fever, he could have spoken after his wont, and given his opinion, his advice, and his consolation; now he was awed into silence.

At length he pulled Mary aside into a corner of the house-place where Mrs. Wilson was sitting, and began to talk to her.

"Yo're right, Mary! She's no ways fit to go to Liverpool, poor soul. Now I've seen her, I only wonder the doctor could ha' been unsettled in his mind at th' first. Choose how it goes wi' poor Jem, she cannot go. One way or another it will soon be over, and best to leave her in the state she is till then."

"I was sure you would think so," said Mary.

But they were reckoning without their host. They esteemed her senses gone, while, in fact, they were only inert, and could not convey impressions rapidly to the over-burdened, troubled brain. They had not noticed that her eyes had followed them (mechanically it seemed at first) as they had moved away to the corner of the room; that her face, hitherto so changeless, had begun to work with one or two of the old symptoms of impatience.

But when they were silent she stood up, and startled them almost as if a dead person had spoken, by saying clearly and decidedly—"I go to Liverpool. I hear you and your plans; and I tell you I shall go to Liverpool. If my words are to kill my son, they have already gone forth out of my mouth, and nought can bring them back. But I will have faith. Alice (up above) has often telled me I wanted faith, and now I will have it. They cannot—they will not kill my child, my only child. I will not be afeared. Yet, oh! I am so sick with terror. But if he is to die, think ye not that I will see him again; ay! see him at his trial. When all are hating him, he shall have his poor mother near him, to give him all the comfort, eyes, and looks, and tears, and a heart that is dead to all but him, can give; his poor old mother, who knows how free he is from sin—in the sight of man at least. They'll let me go to him, maybe, the very minute it's over; and I know many Scripture texts (though you would not think it), that may keep up his heart. I missed seeing him ere he went to yon prison, but nought shall keep me away again one minute when I can see his face; for maybe the minutes are numbered, and the count but small. I know I can be a comfort to him, poor lad. You would not think it, now, but he'd alway speak as kind and soft to me as if he were courting me, like. He loved me above a bit; and am I to leave him now to dree all the cruel slander they'll put upon him? I can pray for him at each hard word they say against him, if I can do nought else; and he'll know what his

mother is doing for him, poor lad, by the look on my face."

Still they made some look, or gesture of opposition to her wishes. She turned sharp round on Mary, the old object of her pettish attacks, and said,

"Now wench! once for all! I tell yo this. *He* could never guide me; and he'd sense enough not to try. What he could na do, don't you try. I shall go to Liverpool to-morrow, and find my lad, and stay with him through thick and thin; and if he dies, why, perhaps, God of His mercy, will take me too. The grave is a sure cure for an aching heart."

She sank back in her chair, quite exhausted by the sudden effort she had made; but if they even offered to speak, she cut them short (whatever the subject might be), with the repetition of the same words, "I shall go to Liverpool."

No more could be said, the doctor's opinion had been so undecided; Mr. Bridgenorth had given his legal voice in favour of her going, and Mary was obliged to relinquish the idea of persuading her to remain at home, if indeed under all the circumstances it could be thought desirable.

"Best way will be," said Job, "for me to hunt out Will, early to-morrow morning, and yo, Mary, come at after with Jane Wilson. I know a decent woman where yo two can have a bed, and where we may meet together when I've found Will, afore going to Mr. Bridgenorth's at two o'clock; for, I can tell him, I'll

not trust none of his clerks for hunting up Will, if Jem's life is to depend on it."

Now Mary disliked this plan inexpressibly ; her dislike was partly grounded on reason, and partly on feeling. She could not bear the idea of deputing to any one the active measures necessary to be taken in order to save Jem. She felt as if they were her duty, her right. She durst not trust to any one the completion of her plan; they might not have energy, or perseverance, or desperation enough to follow out the slightest chance ; and her love would endow her with all these qualities, independently of the terrible alternative which awaited her in case all failed and Jem was condemned. No one could have her motives ; and consequently no one could have her sharpened brain, her despairing determination. Besides (only that was purely selfish), she could not endure the suspense of remaining quiet, and only knowing the result when all was accomplished.

So with vehemence and impatience she rebutted every reason Job adduced for his plan ; and, of course, thus opposed, by what appeared to him wilfulness, he became more resolute, and angry words were exchanged, and a feeling of estrangement rose up between them, for a time, as they walked homewards.

But then came in Margaret with her gentleness, like an angel of peace, so calm and reasonable, that both felt ashamed of their irritation, and tacitly left the decision to her (only, by the way, I think Mary could never have submitted if it had gone against her, penitent

and tearful as was her manner now to Job, the good old man, who was helping her to work for Jem, although they differed as to the manner).

"Mary had better go," said Margaret to her grandfather, in a low tone, "I know what she's feeling, and it will be a comfort to her soon, may be, to think she did all she could herself. She would perhaps fancy it might have been different; do, grandfather, let her."

Margaret had still, you see, little or no belief in Jem's innocence; and besides, she thought if Mary saw Will, and heard herself from him that Jem had not been with him that Thursday night, it would in a measure break the force of the blow which was impending.

"Let me lock up house, grandfather, for a couple of days, and go and stay with Alice. It's but little one like me can do, I know" (she added softly); "but, by the blessing o' God, I'll do it and welcome; and here comes one kindly use o' money, I can hire them as will do for her what I cannot. Mrs. Davenport is a willing body, and one who knows sorrow and sickness, and I can pay her for her time, and keep her there pretty near altogether. So let that be settled. And you take Mrs. Wilson, dear grandad, and let Mary go find Will, and you can all meet together at after, and I'm sure I wish you luck."

Job consented, with only a few dissenting grunts; but, on the whole, with a very good grace for an old man who had been so positive only a few minutes before.

Mary was thankful for Margaret's interference. She did not speak, but threw her arms round Margaret's neck, and put up her rosy-red mouth to be kissed, and even Job was attracted by the pretty, child-like gesture; and when she drew near him, afterwards, like a little creature sidling up to some person whom it feels to have offended, he bent down and blessed her, as if she had been a child of his own.

To Mary the old man's blessing came like words of power.

CHAPTER IX.

"Like a bark upon the sea,
Life is floating over death;
Above, below, encircling thee,
Danger lurks in every breath.

Parted art thou from the grave
Only by a plank most frail;
Tossed upon the restless wave,
Sport of every fickle gale.

Let the skies be e'er so clear,
And so calm and still the sea,
Shipwreck yet has he to fear,
Who life's voyager will be."

RÜCKERT.

THE early trains for Liverpool, on Monday morning, were crowded by attorneys, attorneys' clerks, plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses, all going to the Assizes. They were a motley assembly, each with some cause for anxiety stirring at his heart; though, after all, that is saying little or nothing, for we are all of us in the same predicament through life. Each with a fear and a hope from childhood to death. Among the passengers there was Mary Barton, dressed in the blue gown and obnoxious plaid shawl.

Common as railroads are now in all places as a means of transit, and especially in Manchester, Mary had never been on one before; and she felt bewildered by the hurry, the noise of people, and bells, and horns; the whiz and the scream of the arriving trains.

The very journey itself seemed to her a matter of wonder. She had a back seat, and looked towards the factory-chimneys, and the cloud of smoke which hovers over Manchester, with a feeling akin to the "Heimweh." She was losing sight of the familiar objects of her childhood for the first time; and unpleasant as those objects are to most, she yearned after them with some of the same sentiment which gives pathos to the thoughts of the emigrant.

The cloud-shadows which give beauty to Chat-Moss, the picturesque old houses of Newton, what were they to Mary, whose heart was full of many things? Yet she seemed to look at them earnestly as they glided past; but she neither saw nor heard.

She neither saw nor heard till some well-known names fell upon her ear.

Two lawyers' clerks were discussing the cases to come on that Assizes; of course, "the murder-case," as it had come to be termed, held a conspicuous place in their conversation.

They had no doubt of the result.

"Juries are always very unwilling to convict on circumstantial evidence, it is true," said one, "but here there can hardly be any doubt."

"If it had not been so clear a case," replied the

other, "I should have said they were injudicious in hurrying on the trial so much. Still, more evidence might have been collected."

"They tell me," said the first speaker, "the people in Gardener's office I mean, that it was really feared the old gentleman would have gone out of his mind, if the trial had been delayed. He was with Mr. Gardener as many as seven times on Saturday, and called him up at night to suggest that some letter should be written, or something done to secure the verdict."

"Poor old man," answered his companion, "who can wonder?—an only son,—such a death,—the disagreeable circumstances attending it; I had not time to read the *Guardian* on Saturday, but I understand it was some dispute about a factory girl ?"

"Yes, some such person. Of course she'll be examined, and Williams will do it in style. I shall slip out from our court to hear him if I can hit the nick of time."

"And if you can get a place, you mean, for depend upon it the court will be crowded."

"Ay, ay, the ladies (sweet souls) will come in shoals to hear a trial for murder, and see the murderer, and watch the judge put on his black cap."

"And then go home, and groan over the Spanish ladies who take delight in bull-fights—'such unfeminine creatures!'"

Then they went on to other subjects.

It was but another drop to Mary's cup; but she was nearly in that state which Crabbe describes,

"For when so full the cup of sorrows flows
Add but a drop, it instantly o'erflows."

And now they were in the tunnel!—and now they were in Liverpool; and she must rouse herself from the torpor of mind and body, which was creeping over her; the result of much anxiety and fatigue, and several sleepless nights.

She asked a policeman the way to Milk House Yard, and following his directions with the *savoir faire* of a town-bred girl, she reached a little court leading out of a busy, thronged street, not far from the Docks.

When she entered the quiet little yard she stopped to regain her breath, and to gather strength, for her limbs trembled, and her heart beat violently.

All the unfavourable contingencies she had, until now, forbidden herself to dwell upon, came forward to her mind. The possibility, the bare possibility, of Jem being an accomplice in the murder; the still greater possibility that he had not fulfilled his intention of going part of the way with Will, but had been led off by some little accidental occurrence from his original intention; and that he had spent the evening with those, whom it was now too late to bring forward as witnesses.

But sooner or later she must know the truth; so taking courage she knocked at the door of a house.

"Is this Mrs. Jones's?" she inquired.

"Next door but one," was the curt answer.

And even this extra minute was a reprieve.

Mrs. Jones was busy washing, and would have spoken

angrily to the person who knocked so gently at the door, if anger had been in her nature ; but she was a soft, helpless kind of woman, and only sighed over the many interruptions she had had to her business that unlucky Monday morning.

But the feeling which would have been anger in a more impatient temper, took the form of prejudice against the disturber, whoever he or she might be.

Mary's fluttered and excited appearance strengthened this prejudice in Mrs. Jones's mind, as she stood, stripping the soap-suds off her arms, while she eyed her visitor, and waited to be told what her business was.

But no words would come. Mary's voice seemed choked up in her throat.

"Pray what do you want, young woman ?" coldly asked Mrs. Jones, at last.

"I want—Oh! is Will Wilson here ?"

"No, he is not," replied Mrs. Jones, inclining to shut the door in her face.

"Is he not come back from the Isle of Man ?" asked Mary, sickening.

"He never went ; he stayed in Manchester too long; as perhaps you know, already."

And again the door seemed closing.

But Mary bent forwards with suppliant action (as some young tree bends, when blown by the rough, autumnal wind), and gasped out,

"Tell me—tell me—where is he ?"

Mrs. Jones suspected some love affair, and, perhaps,

one of not the most creditable kind ; but the distress of the pale young creature before her was so obvious, and so pitiable, that were she ever so sinful, Mrs. Jones could no longer uphold her short, reserved manner.

"He's gone this very morning, my poor girl. Step in, and I'll tell you about it."

"Gone!" cried Mary. "How gone ? I must see him,—it's a matter of life and death : he can save the innocent from being hanged,—he cannot be gone,—how gone ?"

"Sailed, my dear! sailed in the *John Cropper* this very blessed morning."

"Sailed!"

CHAPTER X.

"Yon is our quay!
Hark to the clamour in that miry road,
Bounded and narrowed by yon vessel's load;
The lumbering wealth she empties round the place,
Package and parcel, hogshead, chest and case:
While the loud seaman and the angry hind,
Mingling in business, bellow to the wind."

CRABBE.

MARY staggered into the house. Mrs. Jones placed her tenderly in a chair, and there stood bewildered by her side.

"Oh, father! father!" muttered she, "what have you done?—What must I do? must the innocent die?—or he—whom I fear—I fear—oh! what am I saying?" said she, looking round affrighted, and seemingly reassured by Mrs. Jones's countenance, "I am so helpless, so weak,—but a poor girl after all. How can I tell what is right? Father! you have always been so kind to me,—and you to be—never mind—never mind, all will come right in the grave."

"Save us, and bless us!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones, "if I don't think she's gone out of her wits!"

"No, I'm not!" said Mary, catching at the words, and with a strong effort controlling the mind she felt to be wandering, while the red blood flushed to scarlet the heretofore white cheek, "I'm not out of my senses; there is so much to be done—so much—and no one but me to do it, you know,—though I can't rightly tell what it is," looking up with bewilderment into Mrs. Jones's face. "I must not go mad whatever comes—at least not yet. No!" (bracing herself up), "something may yet be done, and I must do it. Sailed! did you say? The *John Cropper?* Sailed?"

"Ay! she went out of dock last night, to be ready for the morning's tide.'"

"I thought she was not to sail till to-morrow," murmured Mary.

"So did Will; (he's lodged here long, so we all call him 'Will,')" replied Mrs. Jones. "The mate had told him so, I believe, and he never knew different till he got to Liverpool on Friday morning; but as soon as he heard, he gave up going to the Isle o' Man, and just ran over to Rhyl with the mate, one John Harris, as has friends a bit beyond Abergele; you may have heard him speak on him, for they are great chums, though I've my own opinion of Harris."

"And he's sailed," repeated Mary, trying by repetition to realise the fact to herself.

"Ay, he went on board last night to be ready for the morning's tide, as I said afore, and my boy went to see the ship go down the river, and came back all agog with the sight. Here, Charley, Charley." She called

out loudly for her son: but Charley was one of those boys who are never "far to seek," as the Lancashire people say, when any thing is going on; a mysterious conversation, an unusual event, a fire, or a riot, any thing, in short; such boys are the little omnipresent people of this world.

Charley had, in fact, been spectator and auditor all this time; though for a little while he had been engaged in 'dollying' and a few other mischievous feats in the washing line, which had prevented his attention from being fully given to his mother's conversation with the strange girl who had entered.

"Oh, Charley! there you are! Did you not see the *John Cropper* sail down the river this morning? Tell the young woman about it, for I think she hardly credits me."

"I saw her tugged down the river by a steam-boat, which comes to same thing," replied he.

"Oh! if I had but come last night!" moaned Mary. "But I never thought of it. I never thought but what he knew right when he said he would be back from the Isle of Man on Monday morning, and not afore—and now some one must die for my negligence!"

"Die!" exclaimed the lad. "How?"

"Oh! Will would have proved an *alibi*,—but he's gone,—and what am I to do?"

"Don't give it up yet," cried the energetic boy, interested at once in the case; "let's have a try for him. We are but where we were if we fail."

Mary roused herself. The sympathetic 'we' gave

her heart and hope. "But what can be done? You say he's sailed; what can be done?" But she spoke louder, and in a more life-like tone.

"No! I did not say he'd sailed; mother said that, and women know nought about such matters. You see" (proud of his office of instructor, and insensibly influenced, as all about her were, by Mary's sweet, earnest, lovely countenance) "there's sand-banks at the mouth of the river, and ships can't get over them but at high-water; especially ships of heavy burden, like the *John Cropper*. Now, she was tugged down the river at low water, or pretty near, and will have to lie some time before the water will be high enough to float her over the banks. So hold up your head,—you've a chance yet, though may be but a poor one."

"But what must I do?" asked Mary, to whom all this explanation had been a vague mystery.

"Do!" said the boy, impatiently, "why, have not I told you? Only women (begging your pardon) are so stupid at understanding about any thing relating to the sea;—you must get a boat, and make all haste, and sail after him,—after the *John Cropper*. You may overtake her, or you may not. It's just a chance; but she's heavy laden, and that's in your favour. She'll draw many feet of water."

Mary had humbly and eagerly (oh, how eagerly!) listened to this young Sir Oracle's speech; but try as she would, she could only understand that she must make haste, and sail—somewhere—

"I beg your pardon" (and her little acknow-

ledgment of inferiority in this speech pleased the lad, and made him her still more zealous friend). "I beg your pardon," said she, "but I don't know where to get a boat. Are there boat-stands ?"

The lad laughed outright.

"You're not long in Liverpool, I guess. Boat-stands ! No ; go down to the pier,—any pier will do, and hire a boat,—you'll be at no loss when once you are there. Only make haste."

"Oh, you need not tell me that, if I but knew how," said Mary, trembling with eagerness. "But you say right,—I never was here before, and I don't know my way to the place you speak on ; only tell me, and I'll not lose a minute."

"Mother !" said the wilful lad, "I'm going to show her the way to the pier ; I'll be back in an hour,—or so,—" he added, in a lower tone.

And before the gentle Mrs. Jones could collect her scattered wits sufficiently to understand half of the hastily formed plan, her son was scudding down the street, closely followed by Mary's half-running steps.

Presently he slackened his pace sufficiently to enable him to enter into conversation with Mary, for once escaped from the reach of his mother's recalling voice, he thought he might venture to indulge his curiosity.

"Ahem !—What's your name? It's so awkward to be calling you young woman."

"My name is Mary,—Mary Barton," answered she, anxious to propitiate one who seemed so willing to exert himself in her behalf, or else she grudged every

word which caused the slightest relaxation in her speed, although her chest seemed tightened, and her head throbbing, from the rate at which they were walking.

"And you want Will Wilson to prove an *alibi*—is that it?"

"Yes—oh, yes—can we not cross now?"

"No, wait a minute; it's the teagle hoisting above your head I'm afraid of;—and who is it that's to be tried?"

"Jem; oh, lad! can't we get past?"

They rushed under the great bales quivering in the air above their heads, and pressed onwards for a few minutes, till Master Charley again saw fit to walk a little slower, and ask a few more questions.

"Mary, is Jem your brother, or your sweetheart, that you're so set upon saving him?"

"No—no," replied she, but with something of hesitation, that made the shrewd boy yet more anxious to clear up the mystery.

"Perhaps he's your cousin, then? Many a girl has a cousin who has not a sweetheart."

"No, he's neither kith nor kin to me. What's the matter? What are you stopping for?" said she, with nervous terror, as Charley turned back a few steps, and peered up a side street.

"Oh, nothing to flurry you so, Mary. I heard you say to mother you had never been in Liverpool before, and if you'll only look up this street you may see the back windows of our Exchange. Such a building as yon is! with 'natomy hiding under a blanket, and Lord Admiral Nelson, and a few more people in the middle of

the court! No! come here," as Mary, in her eagerness, was looking at any window that caught her eye first, to satisfy the boy. "Here, then, now you can see it. You can say, now, you've seen Liverpool Exchange."

"Yes, to be sure—it's a beautiful window, I'm sure. But are we near the boats? I'll stop as I come back, you know; only I think we'd better get on now."

"Oh! if the wind's in your favour, you will be down the river in no time, and catch Will, I'll be bound; and if it's not, why, you know, the minute it took you to look at the Exchange will be neither here nor there."

Another rush onwards, till one of the long crossings near the docks caused a stoppage, and gave Mary time for breathing, and Charley leisure to ask another question.

"You've never said where you come from?"

"Manchester," replied she.

"Eh, then! you've a power of things to see. Liverpool beats Manchester hollow, they say. A nasty, smoky hole, bean't it? Are you bound to live there?"

"Oh, yes! it's my home."

"Well, I don't think I could abide a home in the middle of smoke. Look there! now you see the river! That's something now you'd give a deal for in Manchester. Look!"

And Mary did look, and saw down an opening made in the forest of masts belonging to the vessels in dock, the glorious river, along which white-sailed ships were gliding with the ensigns of all nations not "braving the battle," but telling of the distant lands, spicy or frozen,

that sent to that mighty mart for their comforts or their luxuries ; she saw small boats passing to and fro on that glittering highway, but she also saw such puffs and clouds of smoke from the countless steamers, that she wondered at Charley's intolerance of the smoke of Manchester. Across the swing-bridge, along the pier,—and they stood breathless by a magnificent dock, where hundreds of ships lay motionless during the process of loading and unloading. The cries of the sailors, the variety of languages used by the passers-by, and the entire novelty of the sight compared with any thing which Mary had ever seen, made her feel most helpless and forlorn; and she clung to her young guide as to one who alone by his superior knowledge could interpret between her and the new race of men by whom she was surrounded,—for a new race sailors might reasonably be considered, to a girl who had hitherto seen none but inland dwellers, and those for the greater part factory people.

In that new world of sight and sound, she still bore one pervading thought, and though her eye glanced over the ships and the wide-spreading river, her mind was full of the thought of reaching Will.

" Why are we here ?" asked she, of Charley. " There are no little boats about, and I thought I was to go in a little boat; those ships are never meant for short distances, are they ?"

" To be sure not," replied he, rather contemptuously. " But the *John Cropper* lay in this dock, and I know many of the sailors, and if I could see one I knew, I'd

ask him to run up the mast, and see if he could catch a sight of her in the offing. If she's weighed her anchor no use for your going, you know."

Mary assented quietly to this speech, as if she were as careless as Charley seemed now to be about her overtaking Will ; but in truth her heart was sinking within her, and she no longer felt the energy which had hitherto upheld her. Her bodily strength was giving way, and she stood cold and shivering, although the noon-day sun beat down with considerable power on the shadeless spot where she was standing.

" Here's Tom Bourne !" said Charley; and altering his manner from the patronising key in which he had spoken to Mary, he addressed a weather-beaten old sailor who came rolling along the pathway where they stood, his hands in his pockets, and his quid in his mouth, with very much the air of one who had nothing to do but look about him, and spit right and left ; addressing this old tar, Charley made known to him his wish in slang, which to Mary was almost inaudible, and quite unintelligible, and which I am too much of a land-lubber to repeat correctly.

Mary watched looks and actions with a renovated keenness of perception.

She saw the old man listen attentively to Charley; she saw him eye her over from head to foot, and wind up his inspection with a little nod of approbation (for her very shabbiness and poverty of dress were creditable signs to the experienced old sailor); and then she watched him leisurely swing himself on to a ship in the basin,

and borrowing a glass run up the mast with the speed of a monkey.

"He'll fall!" said she, in affright, clutching at Charley's arm, and judging the sailor, from his storm-marked face and unsteady walk on land, to be much older than he really was.

"Not he!" said Charley. "He's at the mast-head, now. See! he is looking through his glass, and using his arms as steady as if he were on dry land. Why I've been up the mast, many and many a time; only don't tell mother. She thinks I'm to be a shoemaker, but I've made up my mind to be a sailor; only there's no good arguing with a woman. You'll not tell her, Mary?"

"Oh, see!" exclaimed she (his secret was very safe with her, for, in fact, she had not heard it). "See! he's coming down; he's down. Speak to him, Charley."

But unable to wait another instant she called out herself,

"Can you see the *John Cropper?* Is she there yet?"

"Ay, ay," he answered, and coming quickly up to them, he hurried them away to seek for a boat, saying the bar was already covered, and in an hour the ship would hoist her sails, and be off. "You've the wind right against you, and must use oars. No time to lose."

They ran to some steps leading down to the water. They beckoned to some watermen, who, suspecting the

real state of the case, appeared in no hurry for a fare, but leisurely brought their boat alongside the stairs, as if it were a matter of indifference to them whether they were engaged or not, while they conversed together in few words, and in an under-tone, respecting the charge they should make.

"Oh, pray make haste," called Mary. "I want you to take me to the *John Cropper*. Where is she, Charley? Tell them—I don't rightly know the words,—only make haste!"

"In the offing she is, sure enough, miss," answered one of the men, shoving Charley on one side, regarding him as too young to be a principal in the bargain.

"I don't think we can go, Dick," said he, with a wink to his companion, "there's the gentleman over at New Brighton as wants us."

"But, mayhap, the young woman will pay us handsome for giving her a last look at her sweetheart," interposed the other.

"Oh, how much do you want? Only make haste—I've enough to pay you, but every moment is precious," said Mary.

"Ay, that it is. Less than an hour won't take us to the mouth of the river, and she'll be off by two o'clock!"

Poor Mary's ideas of "plenty of money," however, were different to those entertained by the boatmen. Only fourteen or fifteen shillings remained out of the sovereign Margaret had lent her, and the boatmen imagining "plenty," to mean no less than

several pounds, insisted upon receiving a sovereign (an exorbitant fare by the bye, although reduced from their first demand of thirty shillings.)

While Charley, with a boy's impatience of delay, and disregard of money, kept urging,

"Give it 'em, Mary; they'll none of them take you for less. It's your only chance. There's St. Nicholas ringing one!"

"I have only got fourteen and ninepence," cried she, in despair, after counting over her money; "but I'll give you my shawl, and you can sell it for four or five shillings,—oh! won't that much do?" asked she, in such a tone of voice, that they must indeed have had hard hearts who could refuse such agonised entreaty.

They took her on board.

And in less than five minutes she was rocking and tossing in a boat for the first time in her life, alone with two rough, hard-looking men.

CHAPTER XI.

"A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
A wind that follows fast
And fills the white and rustling sail,
And bends the gallant mast!
And bends the gallant mast, my boys,
While, like the eagle free,
Away the good ship flies, and leaves
Old England on the lea."

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

MARY had not understood that Charley was not coming with her. In fact, she had not thought about it, till she perceived his absence, as they pushed off from the landing-place, and remembered that she had never thanked him for all his kind interest in her behalf, and now his absence made her feel most lonely; even his, the little mushroom friend of an hour's growth.

The boat threaded her way through the maze of larger vessels which surrounded the shore, bumping against one, kept off by the oars from going right against another, overshadowed by a third, until at length they were fairly out on the broad river, away

from either shore; the sights, and sounds of land being lost in the distance.

And then came a sort of pause.

Both wind and tide were against the two men, and labour as they would they made but little way. Once Mary in her impatience had risen up to obtain a better view of the progress they had made, but the men had roughly told her to sit down immediately, and she had dropped on her seat like a chidden child, although the impatience was still at her heart.

But now she grew sure they were turning off from the straight course which they had hitherto kept on the Cheshire side of the river, whither they had gone to avoid the force of the current, and after a short time she could not help naming her conviction, as a kind of nightmare dread and belief came over her, that every thing animate and inanimate was in league against her one sole aim and object of overtaking Will.

They answered gruffly. They saw a boatman whom they knew, and were desirous of obtaining his services as steersman, so that both might row with greater effect. They knew what they were about. So she sat silent with clenched hands while the parley went on, the explanation was given, the favour asked and granted. But she was sickening all the time with nervous fear.

They had been rowing a long, long time—half a day it seemed, at least—yet Liverpool appeared still close at hand, and Mary began almost to wonder that the men were not as much disheartened as she was, when the wind which had been hitherto against them, dropped, and

thin clouds began to gather over the sky, shutting out the sun, and casting a chilly gloom over every thing.

There was not a breath of air, and yet it was colder than when the soft violence of the westerly wind had been felt.

The men renewed their efforts. The boat gave a bound forwards at every pull of the oars. The water was glassy and motionless, reflecting tint by tint of the Indian ink sky above. Mary shivered, and her heart sank within her. Still now they evidently were making progress. Then the steersman pointed to a rippling line in the river only a little way off, and the men disturbed Mary, who was watching the ships that lay in what appeared to her the open sea, to get at their sails.

She gave a little start, and rose. Her patience, her grief, and perhaps her silence, had begun to win upon the men.

"Yon second to the norrard is the *John Cropper*. Wind's right now, and sails will soon carry us alongside of her."

He had forgotten (or perhaps he did not like to remind Mary), that the same wind which now bore their little craft along with easy, rapid motion, would also be favourable to the *John Cropper*.

But as they looked with straining eyes, as if to measure the decreasing distance that separated them from her, they saw her sails unfurled and flap in the breeze, till catching the right point, they bellied forth into white roundness, and the ship began to plunge and heave, as if she were a living creature, impatient to be off.

"They're heaving anchor!" said one of the boatmen to the others, as the faint musical cry of the sailors came floating over the waters that still separated them.

Full of the spirit of the chase, though as yet ignorant of Mary's motives, the men sprang to hoist another sail. It was fully as much as the boat could bear, in the keen, gusty east wind which was now blowing, and she bent and laboured, and ploughed, and creaked upbraidingly as if tasked beyond her strength; but she sped along with a gallant swiftness.

They drew nearer, and they heard the distant "ahoy" more clearly. It ceased. The anchor was up, and the ship was away.

Mary stood up, steadying herself by the mast, and stretched out her arms, imploring the flying vessel to stay its course by that mute action, while the tears streamed down her cheeks. The men caught up their oars, and hoisted them in the air, and shouted to arrest attention.

They were seen by the men aboard the larger craft; but they were too busy with all the confusion prevalent in an outward-bound vessel to pay much attention. There were coils of ropes and seamen's chests to be stumbled over at every turn; there were animals, not properly secured, roaming bewildered about the deck, adding their pitiful lowings and bleatings to the aggregate of noises. There were carcases not cut up, looking like corpses of sheep and pigs rather than like mutton and pork; there were sailors running here and there and everywhere, having had no time to fall into method, and

with their minds divided between thoughts of the land and the people they had left, and the present duties on board ship; while the captain strove hard to procure some kind of order by hasty commands given, in a loud, impatient voice, to right and left, starboard and larboard, cabin and steerage.

As he paced the deck with a chafed step, vexed at one or two little mistakes on the part of the mate, and suffering himself from the pain of separation from wife and children, but showing his suffering only by his outward irritation, he heard a hail from the shabby little river-boat that was striving to overtake his winged ship. For the men fearing that, the ship being now fairly over the bar, they should only increase the distance between them, and being now within shouting range, had asked of Mary her more particular desire.

Her throat was dry; all musical sound had gone out of her voice; but in a loud harsh whisper she told the men her errand of life and death, and they hailed the ship.

"We're come for one William Wilson, who is wanted to prove an *alibi* in Liverpool Assize Courts to-morrow. James Wilson is to be tried for a murder, done on Thursday night, when he was with William Wilson. Any thing more, missus?" asked the boat-man of Mary, in a lower voice, and taking his hands down from his mouth.

"Say I'm Mary Barton. Oh, the ship is going on! Oh, for the love of Heaven, ask them to stop."

The boatman was angry at the little regard paid to

his summons, and called out again ; repeating the message with the name of the young woman who sent it, and interlarding it with sailor's oaths.

The ship flew along—away,—the boat struggled after.

They could see the captain take his speaking-trumpet. And oh! and alas! they heard his words.

He swore a dreadful oath ; he called Mary a disgraceful name ; and he said he would not stop his ship for any one, nor could he part with a single hand, whoever swung for it.

The words came in unpitying clearness with their trumpet-sound. Mary sat down, looking like one who prays in the death-agony. For her eyes were turned up to that Heaven, where mercy dwelleth, while her blue lips quivered, though no sound came. Then she bowed her head and hid it in her hands.

"Hark! yon sailor hails us."

She looked up. And her heart stopped its beating to listen.

William Wilson stood as near the stern of the vessel as he could get; and unable to obtain the trumpet from the angry captain, made a tube of his own hands.

"So help me God, Mary Barton, I'll come back in the pilot-boat, time enough to save the life of the innocent."

"What does he say?" asked Mary, wildly, as the voice died away in the increasing distance, while the boatman cheered, in their kindled sympathy with their passenger.

"What does he say?" repeated she. "Tell me. I could not hear."

She had heard with her ears, but her brain refused to recognise the sense.

They repeated his speech, all three speaking at once, with many comments; while Mary looked at them and then at the vessel now far away.

"I don't rightly know about it," said she, sorrowfully. "What is the pilot-boat?"

They told her, and she gathered the meaning out of the sailors' slang which enveloped it. There was a hope still, although so slight and faint.

"How far does the pilot go with the ship?"

To different distances they said. Some pilots would go as far as Holyhead for the chance of the homeward-bound vessels; others only took the ships over the Banks. Some captains were more cautious than others, and the pilots had different ways. The wind was against the homeward bound vessels, so perhaps the pilot aboard the *John Cropper* would not care to go far out.

"How soon would he come back?"

There were three boatmen, and three opinions, varying from twelve hours to two days. Nay, the man who gave his vote for the longest time, on having his judgment disputed, grew stubborn, and doubled the time, and thought it might be the end of the week before the pilot-boat came home.

They began disputing, and urging reasons; and Mary tried to understand them; but independently of their

nautical language, a veil seemed drawn over her mind, and she had no clear perception of any thing that passed. Her very words seemed not her own, and beyond her power of control, for she found herself speaking quite differently to what she meant.

One by one her hopes had fallen away, and left her desolate; and though a chance yet remained, she could no longer hope. She felt certain it, too, would fade and vanish. She sank into a kind of stupor. All outward objects harmonised with her despair.

The gloomy leaden sky,—the deep, dark waters below, of a still heavier shade of colour,—the cold, flat, yellow shore in the distance, which no ray lightened up,—the nipping, cutting wind.

She shivered with her depression of mind and body.

The sails were taken down, of course, on the return to Liverpool, and the progress they made, rowing, and tacking, was very slow. The men talked together, disputing about the pilots at first, and then about matters of local importance, in which Mary would have taken no interest at any time, and she gradually became drowsy; irrepressibly so, indeed, for in spite of her jerking efforts to keep awake she sank away to the bottom of the boat, and there lay couched on a rough heap of sails, ropes, and tackle of various kinds.

The measured beat of the waters against the sides of the boat, and the musical boom of the more distant waves, were more lulling than silence, and she slept sound.

Once she opened her eyes heavily, and dimly saw the old, gray, rough boatman (who had stood out the most

obstinately for the full fare) covering her with his thick pea-jacket. He had taken it off on purpose, and was doing it tenderly in his way, but before she could rouse herself up to thank him she had dropped off to sleep again.

At last, in the dusk of evening, they arrived at the landing-place from which they had started some hours before. The men spoke to Mary, but though she mechanically replied, she did not stir; so, at length, they were obliged to shake her. She stood up, shivering and puzzled as to her whereabouts.

"Now tell me where you are bound to, missus," said the gray old man, "and maybe I can put you in the way."

She slowly comprehended what he said, and went through the process of recollection; but very dimly, and with much labour. She put her hand into her pocket, and pulled out her purse, and shook its contents into the man's hand; and then began meekly to unpin her shawl, although they had turned away without asking for it.

"No, no!" said the older man, who lingered on the step before springing into the boat, and to whom she mutely offered the shawl.

"Keep it! we donnot want it. It were only for to try you,—some folks say they've no more blunt, when all the while they've getten a mint."

"Thank you," said she, in a dull, low tone.

"Where are you bound to? I axed that question afore," said the gruff old fellow.

"I don't know. I'm a stranger," replied she, quietly, with a strange absence of anxiety under the circumstances.

"But you mun find out, then," said he, sharply, "pier-head's no place for a young woman to be standing on, gape-saying."

"I've a card somewhere as will tell me," she answered, and the man partly relieved, jumped into the boat, which was now pushing off to make way for the arrivals from some steamer.

Mary felt in her pocket for the card, on which was written the name of the street where she was to have met Mr. Bridgenorth at two o'clock; where Job and Mrs. Wilson were to have been, and where she was to have learnt from the former the particulars of some respectable lodging. It was not to be found.

She tried to brighten her perceptions, and felt again, and took out the little articles her pocket contained, her empty purse, her pocket-handkerchief, and such little things, but it was not there.

In fact she had dropped it when, so eager to embark, she had pulled out her purse to reckon up her money.

She did not know this, of course. She only knew it was gone.

It added but little to the despair that was creeping over her. But she tried a little more to help herself, though every minute her mind became more cloudy. She strove to remember where Will had lodged, but she could not; name, street, every thing had passed

away, and it did not signify; better she were lost than found.

She sat down quietly on the top step of the landing, and gazed down into the dark, dank water below. Once or twice a spectral thought loomed among the shadows of her brain; a wonder whether beneath that cold dismal surface there would not be rest from the troubles of earth. But she could not hold an idea before her for two consecutive moments; and she forgot what she thought about before she could act upon it.

So she continued sitting motionless, without looking up, or regarding in any way the insults to which she was subjected.

Through the darkening light the old boatman had watched her: interested in her in spite of himself, and his scoldings of himself.

When the landing-place was once more comparatively clear, he made his way towards it, across boats, and along planks, swearing at himself while he did so, for an old fool.

He shook Mary's shoulder violently.

"D— you, I ask you again where you're bound to? Don't sit there, stupid. Where are you going to?"

"I don't know," sighed Mary.

"Come, come; avast with that story. You said a bit ago you'd a card, which was to tell you where to go."

"I had, but I've lost it. Never mind."

She looked again down upon the black mirror below.

He stood by her, striving to put down his better self; but he could not. He shook her again. She looked up, as if she had forgotten him.

"What do you want?" asked she, wearily.

"Come with me, and be d—d to you!" replied he, clutching her arm to pull her up.

She arose and followed him, with the unquestioning docility of a little child.

CHAPTER XII.

"There are who, living by the legal pen,
Are held in honour—honourable men."

CRABBE.

AT five minutes before two, Job Legh stood upon the door-step of the house where Mr. Bridgenorth lodged, at Assize time. He had left Mrs. Wilson at the dwelling of a friend of his, who had offered him a room for the old woman and Mary: a room which had frequently been his, on his occasional visits to Liverpool, but which he was thankful now to have obtained for them, as his own sleeping-place was a matter of indifference to him, and the town appeared crowded and disorderly, on the eve of the Assizes.

He was shown in to Mr. Bridgenorth, who was writing. Mary and Will Wilson had not arrived, being, as you know, far away on the broad sea; but, of course, of this Job knew nothing, and he did not as yet feel much anxiety about their non-appearance; he was more curious to know the result of Mr. Bridgenorth's interview that morning with Jem.

"Why, yes," said Mr. Bridgenorth, putting down his pen, "I have seen him, but to little purpose, I'm afraid. He's very impracticable—very. I told him, of course, that he must be perfectly open with me, or else I could not be prepared for the weak points. I named your name with the view of unlocking his confidence, but—"

"What did he say?" asked Job, breathlessly.

"Why, very little. He barely answered me. Indeed, he refused to answer some questions—positively refused. I don't know what I can do for him."

"Then you think him guilty, sir," said Job, despondingly.

"No, I don't," replied Mr. Bridgenorth, quickly and decisively. "Much less than I did before I saw him. The impression (mind, 'tis only impression; I rely upon your caution, not to take it for fact)—the impression," with an emphasis on the word, "he gave me is, that he knows something about the affair, but what, he will not say; and so, the chances are, if he persists in his obstinacy, he'll be hung. That's all."

He began to write again, for he had no time to lose.

"But he must not be hung," said Job, with vehemence.

Mr. Bridgenorth looked up, smiled a little, but shook his head.

"What did he say, sir, if I may be so bold as to ask?" continued Job.

"His words were few enough, and he was so reserved and short, that as I said before, I can only give you the

impression they conveyed to me. I told him of course who I was, and for what I was sent. He looked pleased, I thought,—at least his face (sad enough when I went in, I assure ye) brightened a little; but he said he had nothing to say, no defence to make. I asked him if he was guilty, then; and by way of opening his heart I said I understood he had had provocation enough, inasmuch as I heard that the girl was very lovely, and had jilted him to fall desperately in love with that handsome young Carson (poor fellow!). But James Wilson did not speak one way or another. I then went to particulars. I asked him if the gun was his, as his mother had declared. He had not heard of her admission it was evident, from his quick way of looking up, and the glance of his eye; but when he saw I was observing him, he hung down his head again, and merely said she was right; it was his gun."

"Well!" said Job, impatiently, as Mr. Bridgenorth paused.

"Nay! I have little more to tell you," continued that gentleman. "I asked him to inform me in all confidence, how it came to be found there. He was silent for a time, and then refused. Not only refused to answer that question, but candidly told me he would not say another word on the subject, and, thanking me for my trouble and interest in his behalf, he all but dismissed me. Ungracious enough on the whole, was it not, Mr. Legh? And yet, I assure ye, I am twenty times more inclined to think him innocent than before I had the interview."

" I wish Mary Barton would come," said Job, anxiously. " She and Will are a long time about it."

" Ay, that's our only chance, I believe," answered Mr. Bridgenorth, who was writing again. " I sent Johnson off before twelve to serve him with his subpœna, and to say I wanted to speak with him ; he'll be here soon, I've no doubt."

There was a pause. Mr. Bridgenorth looked up again, and spoke.

" Mr. Duncombe promised to be here to speak to his character. I sent him a subpœna on Saturday night. Though after all, juries go very little by such general and vague testimony as that to character. It is very right that they should not often ; but in this instance unfortunate for us, as we must rest our case on the *alibi*."

The pen went again, scratch, scratch over the paper.

Job grew very fidgetty. He sat on the edge of his chair, the more readily to start up when Will and Mary should appear. He listened intently to every noise and every step on the stair.

Once he heard a man's footstep, and his old heart gave a leap of delight. But it was only Mr. Bridgenorth's clerk, bringing him a list of those cases in which the grand jury had found true bills. He glanced it over and pushed it to Job, merely saying,

" Of course we expected this," and went on with his writing.

There was a true bill against James Wilson. Of course. And yet Job felt now doubly anxious and sad. It seemed the beginning of the end. He had got to think Jem innocent by imperceptible degrees. Little by little this persuasion had come upon him.

Mary (tossing about in the little boat on the broad river) did not come, nor did Will.

Job grew very restless. He longed to go and watch for them out of the window, but feared to interrupt Mr. Bridgenorth. At length his desire to look out was irresistible, and he got up and walked carefully and gently across the room, his boots creaking at every cautious step. The gloom which had overspread the sky, and the influence of which had been felt by Mary on the open water, was yet more perceptible in the dark, dull street. Job grew more and more fidgetty. He was obliged to walk about the room, for he could not keep still; and he did so, regardless of Mr. Bridgenorth's impatient little motions and noises, as the slow, stealthy, creaking movements were heard, backwards and forwards, behind his chair.

He really liked Job, and was interested for Jem, else his nervousness would have overcome his sympathy long before it did. But he could hold out no longer against the monotonous, grating sound; so at last he threw down his pen, locked his portfolio, and taking up his hat and gloves, told Job he must go to the courts.

"But Will Wilson is not come," said Job, in dismay. "Just wait while I run to his lodgings. I would have

done it before, but I thought they'd be here every minute, and I were afraid of missing them. I'll be back in no time."

"No, my good fellow, I really must go. Besides, I begin to think Johnson must have made a mistake, and have fixed with this William Wilson to meet me at the courts. If you like to wait for him here, pray make use of my room; but I've a notion I shall find him there: in which case, I'll send him to your lodgings; shall I? You know where to find me. I shall be here again by eight o'clock, and with the evidence of this witness that's to prove the *alibi*, I'll have the brief drawn out, and in the hands of counsel to-night."

So saying he shook hands with Job, and went his way. The old man considered for a minute as he lingered at the door, and then bent his steps towards Mrs. Jones's, where he knew (from reference to queer, odd, heterogeneous memoranda, in an ancient black-leather pocket-book) that Will lodged, and where he doubted not he should hear both of him and of Mary.

He went there, and gathered what intelligence he could out of Mrs. Jones's slow replies.

He asked if a young woman had been there that morning, and if she had seen Will Wilson. "No!"

"Why not?"

"Why, bless you, 'cause he had sailed some hours before she came asking for him."

There was a dead silence, broken only by the even, heavy sound of Mrs. Jones's ironing.

"Where is the young woman now?" asked Job.

"Somewhere down at the docks," she thought. "Charley would know, if he was in, but he wasn't. He was in mischief, somewhere or other, she had no doubt. Boys always were. He would break his neck some day, she knew;" so saying, she quietly spat upon her fresh iron, to test its heat, and then went on with her business.

Job could have boxed her, he was in such a state of irritation. But he did not, and he had his reward. Charley came in, whistling with an air of indifference, assumed to carry off his knowledge of the lateness of the hour to which he had lingered about the docks.

"Here's an old man come to know where the young woman is, who went out with thee this morning," said his mother, after she had bestowed on him a little motherly scolding.

"Where she is now, I don't know. I saw her last sailing down the river after the *John Cropper*. I'm afeared she won't reach her; wind changed and she would be under weigh, and over the bar in no time. She should have been back by now."

It took Job some little time to understand this, from the confused use of the feminine pronoun. Then he inquired how he could best find Mary.

"I'll run down again to the pier," said the boy, "I'll warrant I'll find her."

"Thou shalt do no such a thing," said his mother, setting her back against the door. The lad made a comical face at Job, which met with no responsive look from the old man, whose sympathies were naturally in

favour of the parent; although he would thankfully have availed himself of Charley's offer, for he was weary, and anxious to return to poor Mrs. Wilson, who would be wondering what had become of him.

"How can I best find her? Who did she go with, lad?"

But Charley was sullen at his mother's exercise of authority before a stranger, and at that stranger's grave looks when he meant to have made him laugh.

"They were river boatmen;—that's all I know," said he.

"But what was the name of their boat?" persevered Job.

"I never took no notice;—the Anne, or William,—or some of them common names, I'll be bound."

"What pier did she start from?" asked Job, despairingly.

"Oh, as for that matter, it were the stairs on the Prince's Pier she started from; but she'll not come back to the same, for the American steamer came up with the tide, and anchored close to it, blocking up the way for all the smaller craft. It's a rough evening too, to be out on," he maliciously added.

"Well, God's will be done! I did hope we could have saved the lad," said Job, sorrowfully; "but I'm getten very doubtful again. I'm uneasy about Mary, too,—very. She's a stranger in Liverpool."

"So she told me," said Charley. "There's traps about for young women at every corner. It's a pity she has no one to meet her when she lands."

"As for that," replied Job, "I don't see how any one could meet her when we can't tell where she would come to. I must trust to her coming right. She's getten spirit and sense. She'll most likely be for coming here again. Indeed, I don't know what else she can do, for she knows no other place in Liverpool. Missus, if she comes, will you give your son leave to bring her to No. 8, Back Garden Court, where there's friends waiting for her? I'll give him sixpence for his trouble."

Mrs. Jones, pleased with the reference to her, gladly promised. And even Charley, indignant as he was at first at the idea of his motions being under the control of his mother, was mollified at the prospect of the sixpence, and at the probability of getting nearer to the heart of the mystery.

But Mary never came.

CHAPTER XIII.

" Poor Susan moans, poor Susan groans ;
The clock gives warning for eleven ;
'Tis on the stroke—' He must be near,'
Quoth Betty, ' and will soon be here,
As sure as there's a moon in heaven.'

The clock is on the stroke of twelve,
And Johnny is not yet in sight,
—The moon's in heaven, as Betty sees,
But Betty is not quite at ease ;
And Susan has a dreadful night."

WORDSWORTH.

JOB found Mrs. Wilson pacing about in a restless way; not speaking to the woman at whose house she was staying, but occasionally heaving such deep oppressed sighs, as quite startled those around her.

" Well !" said she, turning sharp round in her tottering walk up and down, as Job came in.

" Well, speak !" repeated she, before he could make up his mind what to say; for, to tell the truth, he was studying for some kind-hearted lie which might soothe her for a time. But now the real state of the case came blurting forth in answer to her impatient questioning.

"Will's not to the fore. But he'll may be turn up yet, time enough."

She looked at him steadily for a minute, as if almost doubting if such despair could be in store for her as his words seemed to imply. Then she slowly shook her head, and said, more quietly than might have been expected from her previous excited manner,

"Don't go for to say that! Thou dost not think it. Thou'rt well-nigh hopeless, like me. I seed all along my lad would be hung for what he never did. And better he were, and were shut* of this weary world where there's neither justice nor mercy left."

She looked up with tranced eyes as if praying to that throne where mercy ever abideth, and then sat down.

"Nay, now thou'rt off at a gallop," said Job. "Will has sailed this morning for sure, but that brave wench, Mary Barton, is after him, and will bring him back, I'll be bound, if she can but get speech on him. She's not back yet. Come, come, hold up thy head. It will all end right."

"It will all end right," echoed she; "but not as thou tak'st it. Jem will be hung, and will go to his father and the little lads; where the Lord God wipes away all tears, and where the Lord Jesus speaks kindly to the little ones, who look about for the mothers they left upon earth. Eh, Job, yon's a blessed land, and I long to go to it, and yet I fret because Jem is hastening there. I would not fret if he and I could lie down to-night to

* "Shut," quit.

sleep our last sleep ; not a bit would I fret if folk would but know him to be innocent—as I do."

" They'll know it sooner or later, and repent sore if they've hanged him for what he never did," replied Job.

" Ay, that they will. Poor souls! May God have mercy on them when they find out their mistake."

Presently Job grew tired of sitting waiting, and got up, and hung about the door and window, like some animal wanting to go out. It was pitch dark, for the moon had not yet risen.

" You just go to bed," said he, to the widow. " You'll want your strength for to-morrow. Jem will be sadly off, if he sees you so cut up as you look to-night. I'll step down again and find Mary. She'll be back by this time. I'll come and tell you every thing, never fear. But, now, you go to bed."

" Thou'rt a kind friend, Job Legh, and I'll go, as thou wishest me. But, oh ! mind thou com'st straight off to me, and bring Mary as soon as thou'st lit on her." She spoke low, but very calmly.

" Ay, ay !" replied Job, slipping out of the house.

He went first to Mr. Bridgenorth's, where it had struck him that Will and Mary might be all this time waiting for him.

They were not there, however. Mr. Bridgenorth had just come in, and Job went breathlessly up-stairs to consult with him as to the state of the case.

" It's a bad job," said the lawyer, looking very grave,

while he arranged his papers. "Johnson told me how it was; the woman that Wilson lodged with told him. I doubt it's but a wild-goose chase of the girl Barton. Our case must rest on the uncertainty of circumstantial evidence, and the goodness of the prisoner's previous character. A very vague and weak defence. However, I've engaged Mr. Clinton, as counsel, and he'll make the best of it. And now, my good fellow, I must wish you good-night, and turn you out of doors. As it is, I shall have to sit up into the small hours. Did you see my clerk, as you came up-stairs? You did. Then may I trouble you to ask him to step up immediately."

After this, Job could not stay, and, making his humble bow, he left the room.

Then he went to Mrs. Jones's. She was in, but Charley had slipped off again. There was no holding that boy. Nothing kept him but lock and key, and they did not always; for, once, she had him locked up in the garret, and he had got off through the sky-light. Perhaps, now, he was gone to see after the young woman down at the docks. He never wanted an excuse to be there.

Unasked, Job took a chair, resolved to await Charley's re-appearance.

Mrs. Jones ironed and folded her clothes, talking all the time of Charley and her husband, who was a sailor in some ship bound for India, and who, in leaving her their boy, had evidently left her rather more than she could manage. She moaned and croaked over sailors, and sea-port towns, and stormy weather, and sleepless nights,

and trousers all over tar and pitch, long after Job had left off attending to her, and was only trying to hearken to every step, and every voice in the street.

At last Charley came in, but he came alone.

"Yon Mary Barton has getten into some scrape or another," said he, addressing himself to Job. "She's not to be heard of at any of the piers; and Bourne says it were a boat from the Cheshire side as she went aboard of. So there's no hearing of her till to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning she'll have to be in court, at nine o'clock, to bear witness on a trial," said Job, sorrowfully.

"So she said; at least somewhat of the kind," said Charley, looking desirous to hear more. But Job was silent.

He could not think of any thing further that could be done; so he rose up, and, thanking Mrs. Jones for the shelter she had given him, he went out into the street; and there he stood still, to ponder over probabilities and chances.

After some little time he slowly turned towards the lodging where he had left Mrs. Wilson. There was nothing else to be done; but he loitered on the way, fervently hoping that her weariness and her woes might have sent her to sleep before his return, that he might be spared her questionings.

He went very gently into the house-place where the sleepy landlady awaited his coming, and his bringing the girl, who, she had been told, was to share the old woman's bed.

But in her sleepy blindness she knocked things so about in lighting the candle (she could see to have a nap by fire-light, she said), that the voice of Mrs. Wilson was heard from the little back-room, where she was to pass the night.

"Who's there?"

Job gave no answer, and kept down his breath, that she might think herself mistaken. The landlady, having no such care, dropped the snuffers with a sharp metallic sound, and then by her endless apologies, convinced the listening woman that Job had returned.

"Job! Job Legh!" she cried out, nervously.

"Eh, dear!" said Job, to himself, going reluctantly to her bed-room door. "I wonder if one little lie would be a sin as things stand. It would happen give her sleep, and she won't have sleep for many and a many a night (not to call sleep), if things goes wrong to-morrow. I'll chance it, any way."

"Job! are you there?" asked she again, with a trembling impatience that told in every tone of her voice.

"Ay! sure! I thought thou'd ha' been asleep by this time."

"Asleep! How could I sleep till I knowed if Will were found?"

"Now for it," muttered Job, to himself. Then in a louder voice, "Never fear! he's found, and safe, ready for to-morrow."

"And he'll prove that thing for my poor lad, will

he? He'll bear witness that Jem were with him? Oh, Job, speak! tell me all!"

"In for a penny, in for a pound," thought Job. "Happen one prayer will do for the sum total. Any rate, I must go on now.—Ay, ay," shouted he, through the door. "He can prove all; and Jem will come off as clear as a new-born babe."

He could hear Mrs. Wilson's rustling movements, and in an instant guessed she was on her knees, for he heard her trembling voice uplifted in thanksgiving, and praise to God, stopped at times by sobs of gladness and relief.

And when he heard this, his heart misgave him; for he thought of the awful enlightening, the terrible revulsion of feeling that awaited her in the morning. He saw the short-sightedness of falsehood; but what could he do now?

While he listened, she ended her grateful prayers.

"And Mary? Thou'st found her at Mrs. Jones's, Job?" said she, continuing her inquiries.

He gave a great sigh.

"Yes she was there, safe enough, second time of going.—God forgive me!" muttered he, "who'd ha' thought of my turning out such an arrant liar in my old days?"

"Bless the wench! Is she here? Why does not she come to bed? I'm sure she's need."

Job coughed away his remains of conscience, and made answer,

"She was a bit weary, and o'er done with her sail;

and Mrs. Jones axed her to stay there all night. It was nigh at hand to the courts, where she will have to be in the morning."

"It comes easy enough after a while," groaned out Job. "The father of lies helps one, I suppose, for now my speech comes as natural as truth. She's done questioning now, that's one good thing. I'll be off, before Satan and she are at me again."

He returned to the house-place, where the landlady stood, wearily waiting. Her husband was in bed, and asleep long ago.

But Job had not yet made up his mind what to do. He could not go to sleep, with all his anxieties, if he were put into the best bed in Liverpool.

"Thou'lt let me sit up in this arm-chair," said he, at length, to the woman, who stood, expecting his departure.

He was an old friend, so she let him do as he wished. But, indeed, she was too sleepy to have opposed him. She was too glad to be released, and go to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

" To think
That all this long interminable night,
Which I have passed in thinking on two words—
' Guilty'—' Not Guilty !'—like one happy moment
O'er many a head hath flown unheeded by;
O'er happy sleepers dreaming in their bliss
Of bright to-morrows—or far happier still,
With deep breath buried in forgetfulness.
O all the dismallest images of death
Did swim before my eyes !"

WILSON.

AND now, where was Mary ?

How Job's heart would have been relieved of one of its cares if he could have seen her : for he was in a miserable state of anxiety about her ; and many and many a time through that long night, he scolded her and himself ; her for her obstinacy, and himself for his weakness in yielding to her obstinacy, when she insisted on being the one to follow and find out Will.

She did not pass that night in bed, any more than Job ; but she was under a respectable roof, and among kind, though rough people.

She had offered no resistance to the old boatman,

when he had clutched her arm, in order to insure her following him, as he threaded the crowded dock-ways, and dived up strange bye-streets. She came on meekly after him, scarcely thinking in her stupor where she was going, and glad (in a dead, heavy way) that some one was deciding things for her.

He led her to an old-fashioned house, almost as small as house could be, which had been built long ago, before all the other part of the street, and had a country-town look about it in the middle of that bustling back street. He pulled her into the house-place; and, relieved to a certain degree of his fear of losing her on the way, he exclaimed,

"There!" giving a great slap of one hand on her back.

The room was light and bright, and roused Mary (perhaps the slap on her back might help a little, too), and she felt the awkwardness of accounting for her presence to a little bustling old woman who had been moving about the fire-place on her entrance. The boatman took it very quietly, never deigning to give any explanation, but sitting down in his own particular chair, and chewing tobacco, while he looked at Mary with the most satisfied air imaginable, half triumphantly, as if she were the captive of his bow and spear, and half defyingly, as if daring her to escape.

The old woman, his wife, stood still, poker in hand, waiting to be told who it was that her husband had brought home so unceremoniously; but, as she looked in amazementthe girl's cheek flushed, and then blanched to

a dead whiteness ; a film came over her eyes, and catching at the dresser for support in that hot whirling room, she fell in a heap on the floor.

Both man and wife came quickly to her assistance. They raised her up, still insensible, and he supported her on one knee, while his wife pattered away for some cold fresh water. She threw it straight over Mary; but though it caused a great sob, the eyes still remained closed, and the face as pale as ashes.

"Who is she, Ben?" asked the woman, as she rubbed her unresisting, powerless hands.

"How should I know ?" answered her husband, gruffly.

"Well-a-well" (in a soothing tone, such as you use to irritated children), and as if half to herself, "I only thought you might, you know, as you brought her home. Poor thing! we must not ask ought about her, but that she needs help. I wish I'd my salts at home, but I lent 'em to Mrs. Burton, last Sunday in church, for she could not keep awake through the sermon. Dear-a-me, how white she is!"

"Here! you hold her up a bit," said her husband.

She did as he desired, still crooning to herself, not caring for his short, sharp interruptions as she went on; and, indeed, to her old, loving heart, his crossest words fell like pearls and diamonds, for he had been the husband of her youth ; and even he, rough and crabbed as he was, was secretly soothed by the sound of her voice, although not for worlds, if he could have helped

it, would he have shown any of the love that was hidden beneath his rough outside.

"What's the old fellow after?" said she, bending over Mary, so as to accommodate the drooping head. "Taking my pen, as I've had better nor five year. Bless us, and save us! he's burning it! Ay, I see now, he's his wits about him; burnt feathers is always good for a faint. But they don't bring her round, poor wench! Now what's he after, next? Well! he is a bright one, my old man! That I never thought of that, to be sure!" exclaimed she, as he produced a square bottle of smuggled spirits, labelled "Golden Wasser," from a corner cupboard in their little room.

"That'll do!" said she, as the dose he poured into Mary's open mouth, made her start and cough. "Bless the man! It's just like him to be so tender and thoughtful!"

"Not a bit!" snarled he, as he was relieved by Mary's returning colour, and opened eyes, and wondering, sensible gaze, "Not a bit! I never was such a fool afore."

His wife helped Mary to rise, and placed her in a chair.

"All's right now, young woman?" asked the boatman, anxiously.

"Yes, sir, and thank you. I am sure, sir, I don't know rightly how to thank you," faltered Mary, softly forth.

"Be hanged to you, and your thanks." And he

shook himself, took his pipe, and went out without deigning another word; leaving his wife, sorely puzzled as to the character and history of the stranger within her doors.

Mary watched the boatman leave the house, and then, turning her sorrowful eyes to the face of her hostess, she attempted feebly to rise, with the intention of going away,—where she knew not.

"Nay! nay! who e'er thou be'st, thou'rt not fit to go out into the street. Perhaps" (sinking her voice a little) "thou'rt a bad one; I almost misdoubt thee, thou'rt so pretty. Well-a-well! it's the bad ones as have the broken hearts, sure enough; good folk never get utterly cast down, they've always getten hope in the Lord: it's the sinful as bear the bitter, bitter grief in their crushed hearts, poor souls; it's them we ought, most of all to pity and to help. She shanna leave the house to-night, choose who she is,—worst woman in Liverpool, she shanna. I wished I knew where th' old man picked her up, that I do."

Mary had listened feebly to this soliloquy, and now tried to satisfy her hostess, in weak, broken sentences.

"I'm not a bad one, missis, indeed. Your master took me out to sea after a ship as had sailed. There was a man in it as might save a life at the trial to-morrow. The captain would not let him come, but he says he'll come back in the pilot-boat." She fell to sobbing at the thought of her waning hopes, and the

old woman tried to comfort her, beginning with her accustomed,

"Well-a-well! and he'll come back, I'm sure. I know he will; so keep up your heart. Don't fret about it. He's sure to be back."

"Oh! I'm afraid! I'm sore afraid he won't," cried Mary, consoled, nevertheless, by the woman's assertions, all groundless as she knew them to be.

Still talking half to herself, and half to Mary, the old woman prepared tea, and urged her visitor to eat and refresh herself. But Mary shook her head at the proffered food, and only drank a cup of tea with thirsty eargerness. For the spirits had thrown her into a burning heat, and rendered each impression received through her senses of the most painful distinctness and intensity, while her head ached in a terrible manner.

She disliked speaking, her power over her words seemed so utterly gone. She used quite different expressions to those she intended. So she kept silent, while Mrs. Sturgis (for that was the name of her hostess) talked away, and put her tea-things by, and moved about incessantly, in a manner that increased the dizziness in Mary's head. She felt as if she ought to take leave for the night, and go. But where?

Presently the old man came back; crosser and gruffer than when he went away. He kicked aside the dry shoes his wife had prepared for him, and snarled at all she said. Mary attributed this to his finding her still there, and gathered up her strength for an effort to leave

the house. But she was mistaken. By-and-bye, he said (looking right into the fire, as if addressing it) "Wind's right against them!"

"Ay, ay, and is it so?" said his wife, who knowing him well, knew that his surliness proceeded from some repressed sympathy. "Well-a-well, wind changes often at night. Time enough before morning. I'd bet a penny it has changed sin' thou looked."

She looked out of their little window at a weather-cock near, glittering in the moonlight; and as she was a sailor's wife, she instantly recognised the unfavourable point at which the indicator seemed stationary, and giving a heavy sigh, turned into the room, and began to beat about in her own mind for some other mode of comfort.

"There's no one else who can prove what you want at the trial to-morrow, is there?" asked she.

"No one!" answered Mary.

"And you've no clue to the one as is really guilty, if t'other is not?"

Mary did not answer, but trembled all over.

Sturgis saw it.

"Don't bother her with thy questions," said he, to his wife. "She mun go to bed, for she's all in a shiver with the sea air. I'll see after the wind, hang it, and the weather-cock, too. Tide will help 'em when it turns."

Mary went up-stairs murmuring thanks and blessings on those who took the stranger in. Mrs. Sturgis led her into a little room redolent of the sea, and foreign

lands. There was a small bed for one son, bound for China; and a hammock slung above for another, who was now tossing in the Baltic. The sheets looked made out of sail-cloth, but were fresh and clean in spite of their brownness.

Against the wall were wafered two rough drawings of vessels with their names written underneath, on which the mother's eyes caught, and gazed until they filled with tears. But she brushed the drops away with the back of her hand; and in a cheerful tone, went on to assure Mary the bed was well aired.

"I cannot sleep, thank you. I will sit here, if you please," said Mary, sinking down on the window-seat.

"Come, now," said Mrs. Sturgis, "my master told me to see you to bed, and I mun. What's the use of watching? A watched pot never boils, and I see you are after watching that weather-cock. Why now, I try never to look at it, else I could do nought else. My heart many a time goes sick when the wind rises, but I turn away and work away, and try never to think on the wind, but on what I ha getten to do."

"Let me stay up a little," pleaded Mary, as her hostess seemed so resolute about seeing her to bed. Her looks won her suit.

"Well, I suppose I mun. I shall catch it down stairs, I know. He'll be in a fidget till you have getten to bed, I know; so you mun be quiet if you are so bent upon staying up."

And quietly, noiselessly, Mary watched the unchanging weather-cock through the night. She sat on the little window-seat, her hand holding back the curtain which shaded the room from the bright moonlight without; her head resting its weariness against the corner of the window-frame; her eyes burning, and stiff with the intensity of her gaze.

The ruddy morning stole up the horizon, casting a crimson glow into the watcher's room.

It was the morning of the day of trial!

CHAPTER XV.

"Thou stand'st here arraign'd,
That, with presumption impious and accursed,
Thou hast usurp'd God's high prerogative,
Making thy fellow mortal's life and death
Wait on thy moody and diseased passions;
That with a violent and untimely steel
Hast set abroach the blood, that should have ebbed
In calm and natural current: to sum all
In one wild name—a name the pale air freezes at,
And every cheek of man sinks in with horror—
Thou art a cold and midnight murderer."

MILMAN'S 'FAZIO.'

OF all the restless people who found that night's hours agonising from excess of anxiety, the poor father of the murdered man was perhaps the most restless. He had slept but little since the blow had fallen; his waking hours had been too full of agitated thought, which seemed to haunt and pursue him through his unquiet slumbers.

And this night of all others was the most sleepless. He turned over and over again in his mind the wonder if every thing had been done that could be done, to

insure the conviction of Jem Wilson. He almost regretted the haste with which he had urged forward the proceedings, and yet until he had obtained vengeance, he felt as if there was no peace on earth for him (I don't know that he exactly used the term vengeance in his thoughts; he spoke of justice, and probably thought of his desired end as such); no peace either bodily, or mental, for he moved up and down his bedroom with the restless incessant tramp of a wild beast in a cage, and if he compelled his aching limbs to cease for an instant, the twitchings which ensued almost amounted to convulsions, and he re-commenced his walk as the lesser evil, and the more bearable fatigue.

With daylight, increased power of action came; and he drove off to arouse his attorney, and worry him with further directions and inquiries; and when that was ended, he sat, watch in hand, until the courts should be opened, and the trial begin.

What were all the living,—wife or daughters,—what were they in comparison with the dead,—the murdered son who lay unburied still, in compliance with his father's earnest wish, and almost vowed purpose of having the slayer of his child sentenced to death, before he committed the body to the rest of the grave?

At nine o'clock they all met at their awful place of *rendezvous*.

The judge, the jury, the avenger of blood, the prisoner, the witnesses—all were gathered together within one building. And besides these were many others,

personally interested in some part of the proceedings, in which however, they took no part; Job Legh, Ben Sturgis, and several others were there, amongst whom was Charley Jones.

Job Legh had carefully avoided any questioning from Mrs. Wilson that morning. Indeed he had not been much in her company, for he had risen up early to go out once more to make inquiry for Mary; and when he could hear nothing of her, he had desperately resolved not to undeceive Mrs. Wilson, as sorrow never came too late; and if the blow were inevitable, it would be better to leave her in ignorance of the impending evil as long as possible. She took her place in the witness-room, worn and dispirited, but not anxious.

As Job struggled through the crowd into the body of the court, Mr. Bridgenorth's clerk beckoned to him.

"Here's a letter for you from our client!"

Job sickened as he took it. He did not know why, but he dreaded a confession of guilt, which would be an overthrow of all hope.

The letter ran as follows.

"DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you heartily for your goodness in finding me a lawyer, but lawyers can do no good to me, whatever they may do to other people. But I am not the less obliged to you, dear friend. I foresee things will go against me—and no wonder. If I was a jury-man, I should say the man was guilty as had as much evidence brought against him as may

be brought against me to-morrow. So it's no blame to them if they do. But, Job Legh, I think I need not tell you I am as guiltless in this matter as the babe unborn, although it is not in my power to prove it. If I did not believe that you thought me innocent, I could not write as I do now to tell you my wishes. You'll not forget they are the wishes of a man shortly to die. Dear friend, you must take care of my mother. Not in the money way, for she will have enough for her and Aunt Alice; but you must let her talk to you of me; and show her that (whatever others may do) you think I died innocent. I don't reckon she will stay long behind when we are all gone. Be tender with her, Job, for my sake; and if she is a bit fractious at times, remember what she has gone through. I know mother will never doubt me, God bless her.

"There is one other whom I fear I have loved too dearly; and yet, the loving her has made the happiness of my life. She will think I have murdered her lover; she will think I have caused the grief she must be feeling. And she must go on thinking so. It is hard upon me to say this; but she *must*. It will be best for her, and that's all I ought to think on. But, dear Job, you are a hearty fellow for your time of life, and may live a many years to come; and perhaps you could tell her, when you felt sure you were drawing near your end, that I solemnly told you (as I do now) that I was innocent of this thing. You must not tell her for many years to come; but I cannot well bear to think on her living through a long life, and hating the thought

of me as the murderer of him she loved, and dying with that hatred to me in her heart. It would hurt me sore in the other world to see the look of it in her face, as it would be, till she was told. I must not let myself think on how she must be viewing me now. So God bless you, Job Legh ; and no more from,

" Yours to command,

" James Wilson."

Job turned the letter over and over when he had read it ; sighed deeply ; and then wrapping it carefully up in a bit of newspaper he had about him, he put it in his waistcoat pocket, and went off to the door of the witness-room to ask if Mary Barton were there.

As the door opened he saw her sitting within, against a table on which her folded arms were resting, and her head was hidden within them. It was an attitude of hopelessness, and would have served to strike Job dumb in sickness of heart, even without the sound of Mrs. Wilson's voice in passionate sobbing, and sore lamentations, which told him as well as words could do (for she was not within view of the door, and he did not care to go in), that she was at any rate partially undeceived as to the hopes he had given her last night.

Sorrowfully did Job return into the body of the court ; neither Mrs. Wilson nor Mary having seen him as he had stood at the witness-room door.

As soon as he could bring his distracted thoughts to bear upon the present scene, he perceived that the trial

of James Wilson for the murder of Henry Carson was just commencing. The clerk was gabbling over the indictment, and in a minute or two there was the accustomed question, "How say you, Guilty, or Not Guilty ?"

Although but one answer was expected,—was customary in all cases,—there was a pause of dead silence, an interval of solemnity even in this hackneyed part of the proceeding; while the prisoner at the bar stood with compressed lips, looking at the judge with his outward eyes, but with far other and different scenes presented to his mental vision ;—a sort of rapid recapitulation of his life,—remembrances of his childhood,—his father (so proud of him, his first-born child),—his sweet little playfellow, Mary,—his hopes, his love,—his despair, yet still, yet ever and ever, his love,—the blank, wide world it had been without her love,—his mother,—his childless mother,—but not long to be so,—not long to be away from all she loved,—nor during that time to be oppressed with doubt as to his innocence, sure and secure of her darling's heart ;—he started from his instant's pause, and said in a low firm voice,

"Not guilty, my lord."

The circumstances of the murder, the discovery of the body, the causes of suspicion against Jem, were as well known to most of the audience as they are to you, so there was some little buzz of conversation going on among the people while the leading counsel for the prosecution made his very effective speech.

"That's Mr. Carson, the father, sitting behind Serjeant Wilkinson!"

"What a noble-looking old man he is! so stern and inflexible, with such classical features! Does he not remind you of some of the busts of Jupiter?"

"I am more interested by watching the prisoner. Criminals always interest me. I try to trace in the features common to humanity some expression of the crimes by which they have distinguished themselves from their kind. I have seen a good number of murderers in my day, but I have seldom seen one with such marks of Cain on his countenance as the man at the bar."

"Well, I am no physiognomist, but I don't think his face strikes me as bad. It certainly is gloomy and depressed, and not unnaturally so, considering his situation."

"Only look at his low, resolute brow, his downcast eye, his white compressed lips. He never looks up,—just watch him."

"His forehead is not so low if he had that mass of black hair removed, and is very square, which some people say is a good sign. If others are to be influenced by such trifles as you are, it would have been much better if the prison barber had cut his hair a little previous to the trial; and as for down-cast eye, and compressed lip, it is all part and parcel of his inward agitation just now; nothing to do with character, my good fellow."

Poor Jem! His raven hair (his mother's pride, and

so often fondly caressed by her fingers), was that too to have its influence against him ?

The witnesses were called. At first they consisted principally of policemen ; who, being much accustomed to giving evidence, knew what were the material points they were called on to prove, and did not lose the time of the court in listening to any thing unnecessary.

" Clear as day against the prisoner," whispered one attorney's clerk to another.

" Black as night, you mean," replied his friend ; and they both smiled.

" Jane Wilson ! who's she ? some relation, I suppose, from the name."

" The mother,—she that is to prove the gun-part of the case."

" Oh, ay—I remember ! Rather hard on her, too, I think."

Then both were silent, as one of the officers of the court ushered Mrs. Wilson into the witness-box. I have often called her " the old woman," and " an old woman," because, in truth, her appearance was so much beyond her years, which might not be many above fifty. But partly owing to her accident in early life, which left a stamp of pain upon her face, partly owing to her anxious temper, partly to her sorrows, and partly to her limping gait, she always gave me the idea of age. But now she might have seemed more than seventy ; her lines were so set and deep, her features so sharpened, and her walk so feeble. She was trying to check her sobs into

composure, and (unconsciously) was striving to behave as she thought would best please her poor boy, whom she knew she had often grieved by her uncontrolled impatience. He had buried his face in his arms, which rested on the front of the dock (an attitude he retained during the greater part of his trial, and which prejudiced many against him.)

The counsel began the examination.

"Your name is Jane Wilson, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"The mother of the prisoner at the bar?"

"Yes, sir;" with quivering voice, ready to break out into weeping, but earning respect by the strong effort at self-control, prompted, as I have said before, by her earnest wish to please her son by her behaviour.

The barrister now proceeded to the important part of the examination, tending to prove that the gun found on the scene of the murder was the prisoner's. She had committed herself so fully to the policeman, that she could not well retract; so without much delay in bringing the question round to the desired point, the gun was produced in court, and the inquiry made—

"That gun belongs to your son, does it not?"

She clenched the sides of the witness-box in her efforts to make her parched tongue utter words. At last she moaned forth,

"Oh! Jem, Jem! what mun I say?"

Every one bent forward to hear the prisoner's answer; although, in fact, it was of little importance to the issue

of the trial. He lifted up his head; and with a face brimming full of pity for his mother, yet resolved into endurance, said,

"Tell the truth, mother!"

And so she did with the fidelity of a little child. Every one felt that she did; and the little colloquy between mother and son, did them some slight service in the opinion of the audience. But the awful judge sat unmoved; and the jurymen changed not a muscle of their countenances; while the counsel for the prosecution went triumphantly through this part of the case, including the fact of Jem's absence from home on the night of the murder, and bringing every admission to bear right against the prisoner.

It was over. She was told to go down. But she could no longer compel her mother's heart to keep silence, and suddenly turning towards the judge (with whom she imagined the verdict to rest), she thus addressed him with her choking voice.

"And now, sir, I've telled you the truth, and the whole truth, as *he* bid me; but don't ye let what I have said go for to hang him; oh, my lord judge, take my word for it, he's as innocent as the child as has yet to be born. For sure, I, who am his mother, and have nursed him on my knee, and been gladdened by the sight of him every day since, ought to know him better than yon pack of fellows" (indicating the jury, while she strove against her heart to render her words distinct and clear for her dear son's sake) "who, I'll go bail, never

saw him before this morning in all their born days. My lord judge, he's so good I often wondered what harm there was in him; many is the time when I've been fretted (for I'm frabbit enough at times), when I've scoldt myself, and said, 'You ungrateful thing, the Lord God has given you Jem, and isn't that blessing enough for you.' But He has seen fit to punish me. If Jem is—if Jem is—taken from me, I shall be a childless woman; and very poor, having nought left to love on earth, and I cannot say 'His will be done.' I cannot, my lord judge, oh, I cannot."

While sobbing out these words she was led away by the officers of the court, but tenderly, and reverently, with the respect which great sorrow commands.

The stream of evidence went on and on, gathering fresh force from every witness who was examined, and threatening to overwhelm poor Jem. Already they had proved that the gun was his, that he had been heard not many days before the commission of the deed, to threaten the deceased; indeed, that the police had, at that time, been obliged to interfere to prevent some probable act of violence. It only remained to bring forward a sufficient motive for the threat and the murder. The clue to this had been furnished by the policeman, who had overheard Jem's angry language to Mr. Carson; and his report in the first instance had occasioned the subpœna to Mary.

And now she was to be called on to bear witness. The court was by this time almost as full as it could hold;

but fresh attempts were being made to squeeze in at all the entrances, for many were anxious to see and hear this part of the trial.

Old Mr. Carson felt an additional beat at his heart at the thought of seeing the fatal Helen, the cause of all —a kind of interest and yet repugnance, for was not she beloved by the dead ; nay, perhaps in her way, loving and mourning for the same being that he himself was so bitterly grieving over? And yet he felt as if he abhorred her and her rumoured loveliness, as if she were the curse against him ; and he grew jealous of the love with which she had inspired his son, and would fain have deprived her of even her natural right of sorrowing over her lover's untimely end: for you see it was a fixed idea in the minds of all, that the handsome, bright, gay, rich young gentleman must have been beloved in preference to the serious, almost stern-looking smith, who had to toil for his daily bread.

Hitherto the effect of the trial had equalled Mr. Carson's most sanguine hopes, and a severe look of satisfaction came over the face of the avenger,—over that countenance whence the smiles had departed, never more to return.

All eyes were directed to the door through which the witnesses entered. Even Jem looked up to catch one glimpse, before he hid his face from her look of aversion. The officer had gone to fetch her.

She was in exactly the same attitude as when Job Legh had seen her two hours before through the half-open door. Not a finger had moved. The officer

summoned her, but she did not stir. She was so still he thought she had fallen asleep, and he stepped forward and touched her. She started up in an instant, and followed him with a kind of rushing rapid motion into the court, into the witness-box.

And amid all that sea of faces, misty and swimming before her eyes, she saw but two clear bright spots, distinct and fixed: the judge, who might have to condemn; and the prisoner, who might have to die.

The mellow sunlight streamed down that high window on her head, and fell on the rich treasure of her golden hair, stuffed away in masses under her little bonnet-cap; and in those warm beams the motes kept dancing up and down. The wind had changed—had changed almost as soon as she had given up her watching; the wind had changed, and she heeded it not.

Many who were looking for mere flesh and blood beauty, mere colouring, were disappointed; for her face was deadly white, and almost set in its expression, while a mournful bewildered soul looked out of the depths of those soft, deep, gray eyes. But, others recognised a higher and stranger kind of beauty; one that would keep its hold on the memory for many after years.

I was not there myself; but one who was, told me that her look, and indeed her whole face, was more like the well-known engraving from Guido's picture of "Beatrice Cenci" than any thing else he could give me an idea of. He added, that her countenance haunted him,

like the remembrance of some wild sad melody, heard in childhood; that it would perpetually recur with its mute imploring agony.

With all the court reeling before her (always save and except those awful two), she heard a voice speak, and answered the simple inquiry (something about her name) mechanically, as if in a dream. So she went on for two or three more questions, with a strange wonder in her brain, as to the reality of the terrible circumstances in which she was placed.

Suddenly she was roused, she knew not how or by what. She was conscious that all was real, that hundreds were looking at her, that true-sounding words were being extracted from her; that that figure, so bowed down, with the face concealed by both hands, was really Jem. Her face flashed scarlet, and then paler than before. But in her dread of herself, with the tremendous secret imprisoned within her, she exerted every power she had to keep in the full understanding of what was going on, of what she was asked, and of what she answered. With all her faculties preternaturally alive and sensitive, she heard the next question from the pert young barrister, who was delighted to have the examination of this witness.

"And pray, may I ask, which was the favoured lover? You say you knew both these young men. Which was the favoured lover? Which did you prefer?"

And who was he, the questioner, that he should dare so lightly to ask of her heart's secrets? That he

should dare to ask her to tell, before that multitude assembled there, what woman usually whispers with blushes and tears, and many hesitations, to one ear alone?

So, for an instant, a look of indignation contracted Mary's brow, as she steadily met the eyes of the impertinent counsellor. But, in that instant, she saw the hands removed from a face beyond, behind; and a countenance revealed of such intense love and woe,—such a deprecating dread of her answer; and suddenly her resolution was taken. The present was everything; the future, that vast shroud, it was maddening to think upon; but *now* she might own her fault, but *now* she might even own her love. Now, when the beloved stood thus, abhorred of men, there would be no feminine shame to stand between her and her avowal. So she also turned towards the judge, partly to mark that her answer was not given to the monkeyfied man who questioned her, and likewise that her face might be averted from, and her eyes not gaze upon, the form that contracted with the dread of the words he anticipated.

"He asks me which of them two I liked the best. Perhaps I liked Mr. Harry Carson once—I don't know—I've forgotten; but I loved James Wilson, that's now on trial, above what tongue can tell—above all else on earth put together; and I love him now better than ever, though he has never known a word of it till this minute. For, you see, sir, mother died before I was thirteen, before I could know right from wrong about some things; and I was giddy and vain, and ready to

listen to any praise of my good looks ; and this poor young Mr. Carson fell in with me, and told me he loved me ; and I was foolish enongh to think he meant me marriage : a mother is a pitiful loss to a girl, sir ; and so I used to fancy I could like to be a lady, and rich, and never know want any more. I never found out how dearly I loved another till one day, when James Wilson asked me to marry him, and I was very hard and sharp in my answer (for, indeed, sir, I'd a deal to bear just then), and he took me at my word and left me ; and from that day to this I've never spoken a word to him, or set eyes on him ; though I'd fain have done so, to try and show him we had both been too hasty ; for he had not been gone out of my sight above a minute before I knew I loved—far above my life," said she, dropping her voice as she came to this second confession of the strength of her attachment. "But, if the gentleman asks me which I loved the best, I make answer, I was flattered by Mr. Carson, and pleased with his flattery; but James Wilson I——."

She covered her face with her hands, to hide the burning scarlet blushes, which even dyed her fingers.

There was a little pause ; still, though her speech might inspire pity for the prisoner, it only strengthened the supposition of his guilt. Presently the counsellor went on with his examination.

"But you have seen young Mr. Carson since your rejection of the prisoner ?"

"Yes, often."

"You have spoken to him, I conclude, at these times."

"Only once to call speaking."

"And what was the substance of your conversation? Did you tell him you found you preferred his rival?"

"No sir. I don't think as I've done wrong in saying, now as things stand, what my feelings are; but I never would be so bold as to tell one young man I cared for another. I never named Jem's name to Mr. Carson. Never."

"Then what did you say when you had this final conversation with Mr. Carson? You can give me the substance of it, if you don't remember the words."

"I'll try, sir; but I'm not very clear. I told him I could not love him, and wished to have nothing more to do with him. He did his best to over-persuade me, but I kept steady, and at last I ran off."

"And you never spoke to him again?"

"Never!"

"Now, young woman, remember you are upon your oath. Did you ever tell the prisoner at the bar of Mr. Henry Carson's attentions to you? of your acquaintance, in short? Did you ever try to excite his jealousy by boasting of a lover so far above you in station?"

"Never. I never did," said she, in so firm and distinct a manner as to leave no doubt.

"Were you aware that he knew of Mr. Henry Carson's regard for you? Remember you are on your oath!"

"Never, sir. I was not aware until I heard of the quarrel between them, and what Jem had said to the

policeman, and that was after the murder. To this day I can't make out who told Jem. Oh sir, may not I go down ?"

For she felt the sense, the composure, the very bodily strength which she had compelled to her aid for a time, suddenly giving way, and was conscious that she was losing all command over herself. There was no occasion to detain her longer ; she had done her part. She might go down. The evidence was still stronger against the prisoner ; but now he stood erect and firm, with self-respect in his attitude, and a look of determination on his face, which almost made it appear noble. Yet he seemed lost in thought.

Job Legh had all this time been trying to soothe and comfort Mrs. Wilson, who would first be in the court, in order to see her darling, and then, when her sobs became irrepressible, had to be led out into the open air, and sat there weeping, on the steps of the court-house. Who would have taken charge of Mary on her release from the witness-box I do not know, if Mrs. Sturgis, the boatman's wife, had not been there, brought by her interest in Mary, towards whom she now pressed, in order to urge her to leave the scene of the trial.

"No! no!" said Mary, to this proposition. "I must be here, I must watch that they don't hang him, you know I must."

"Oh! they'll not hang him! never fear! Besides the wind has changed, and that's in his favour. Come away. You're so hot, and first white and then red ; I'm sure you're ill. Just come away."

"Oh! I don't know about any thing but that I must stay," replied Mary, in a strange hurried manner, catching hold of some rails as if she feared some bodily force would be employed to remove her. So Mrs. Sturgis just waited patiently by her, every now and then peeping among the congregation of heads in the body of the court, to see if her husband were still there. And there he always was to be seen, looking and listening with all his might. His wife felt easy that he would not be wanting her at home until the trial was ended.

Mary never let go her clutched hold on the rails. She wanted them to steady her, in that heaving, whirling court. She thought the feeling of something hard compressed within her hand would help her to listen, for it was such pain, such weary pain in her head, to strive to attend to what was being said. They were all at sea, sailing away on billowy waves, and every one speaking at once, and no one heeding her father, who was calling on them to be silent, and listen to him. Then again, for a brief second, the court stood still, and she could see the judge, sitting up there like an idol, with his trappings, so rigid and stiff; and Jem, opposite, looking at her, as if to say, am I to die for what you know your ———. Then she checked herself, and by a great struggle brought herself round to an instant's sanity. But the round of thought never stood still; and off she went again; and every time her power of struggling against the growing delirium grew fainter and fainter. She muttered low to herself, but no one heard her except her neighbour, Mrs.

Sturgis ; all were too closely attending to the case for the prosecution, which was now being wound up.

The counsel for the prisoner had avoided much cross-examination, reserving to himself the right of calling the witnesses forward again ; for he had received so little, and such vague instructions, and understood that so much depended on the evidence of one who was not forthcoming, that in fact he had little hope of establishing any thing like a show of a defence, and contented himself with watching the case, and lying in wait for any legal objections that might offer themselves. He lay back on the seat, occasionally taking a pinch of snuff, in a manner intended to be contemptuous; now and then elevating his eyebrows, and sometimes exchanging a little note with Mr. Bridgenorth behind him. The attorney had far more interest in the case than the barrister, to which he was perhaps excited by his poor old friend Job Legh ; who had edged and wedged himself through the crowd close to Mr. Bridgenorth's elbow, sent thither by Ben Sturgis, to whom he had been " introduced" by Charley Jones, and who had accounted for Mary's disappearance on the preceding day, and spoken of their chase, their fears, their hopes.

All this was told in few words to Mr. Bridgenorth—so few, that they gave him but a confused idea, that time was of value; and this he named to his counsel, who now rose to speak for the defence.

Job Legh looked about for Mary, now he had gained, and given, some idea of the position of things. At last

he saw her, standing by a decent-looking woman, looking flushed and anxious, and moving her lips incessantly, as if eagerly talking; her eyes never resting on any object, but wandering about as if in search of something. Job thought it was for him she was seeking, and he struggled to get round to her. When he had succeeded, she took no notice of him, although he spoke to her, but still kept looking round and round in the same wild, restless manner. He tried to hear the low quick mutterings of her voice ; he caught the repetition of the same words over and over again.

"I must not go mad. I must not, indeed. They say people tell the truth when they're mad; but I don't. I was always a liar. I was, indeed ; but I'm not mad. I must not go mad. I must not, indeed."

Suddenly she seemed to become aware how earnestly Job was listening (with mournful attention) to her words, and turning sharp round upon him, with upbraiding, for his eaves-dropping, on her lips, she caught sight of something,—or some one,—who, even in that state, had power to arrest her attention, and throwing up her arms with wild energy, she shrieked aloud,

"Oh, Jem ! Jem ! you're saved; and I *am* mad—" and was instantly seized with convulsions. With much commiseration she was taken out of court, while the attention of many was diverted from her, by the fierce energy with which a sailor forced his way over rails and seats, against turnkeys and policemen. The officers of the court opposed this forcible manner of entrance, but they could hardly induce the offender to adopt any quieter

way of attaining his object, and telling his tale in the witness-box, the legitimate place. For Will had dwelt so impatiently on the danger in which his absence would place his cousin, that, even yet, he seemed to fear that he might see the prisoner carried off, and hung, before he could pour out the narrative which would exculpate him. As for Job Legh, his feelings were all but uncontrollable; as you may judge, by the indifference with which he saw Mary borne, stiff and convulsed, out of the court, in the charge of the kind Mrs. Sturgis, who, you will remember, was an utter stranger to him.

"She'll keep! I'll not trouble myself about her," said he to himself, as he wrote with trembling hands a little note of information to Mr. Bridgenorth, who had conjectured, when Will had first disturbed the awful tranquillity of the life-and-death court, that the witness had arrived (better late than never) on whose evidence rested all the slight chance yet remaining to Jem Wilson of escaping death. During the commotion in the court, among all the cries and commands, the dismay and the directions, consequent upon Will's entrance, and poor Mary's fearful attack of illness, Mr. Bridgenorth had kept his lawyer-like presence of mind; and long before Job Legh's almost illegible note was poked at him, he had recapitulated the facts on which Will had to give evidence, and the manner in which he had been pursued, after his ship had taken her leave of the land.

The barrister, who defended Jem, took new heart

when he was put in possession of these striking points to be adduced, not so much out of earnestness to save the prisoner, of whose innocence he was still doubtful, as because he saw the opportunities for the display of forensic eloquence which were presented by the facts; "a gallant tar brought back from the pathless ocean by a girl's noble daring," "the dangers of too hastily judging from circumstantial evidence," &c., &c.; while the counsellor for the prosecution prepared himself by folding his arms, elevating his eyebrows, and putting his lips in the form in which they might best whistle down the wind such evidence as might be produced by a suborned witness, who dared to perjure himself. For, of course, it is etiquette to suppose that such evidence as may be given against the opinion which lawyers are paid to uphold, is any thing but based on truth; and "perjury," "conspiracy," and "peril of your immortal soul," are light expressions to throw at the heads of those who may prove (not the speaker, there would then be some excuse for the hasty words of personal anger, but) the hirer of the speaker to be wrong, or mistaken.

But when once Will had attained his end, and felt that his tale, or part of a tale, would be heard by judge and jury; when once he saw Jem standing safe and well before him (even though he saw him pale and careworn at the felon's bar); his courage took the shape of presence of mind, and he awaited the examination with a calm, unflinching, intelligence, which dictated the clearest and most pertinent answers. He told the story you know so well. How his leave of absence being

nearly expired, he had resolved to fulfil his promise, and go to see an uncle residing in the Isle of Man; how his money (sailor-like) was all expended in Manchester, and how, consequently, it had been necessary for him to walk to Liverpool, which he had accordingly done on the very night of the murder, accompanied as far as Parkside by his friend and cousin, the prisoner at the bar. He was clear and distinct in every corroborative circumstance, and gave a short account of the singular way in which he had been recalled from his outward-bound voyage, and the terrible anxiety he had felt, as the pilot-boat had struggled home against the wind. The jury felt that their opinion (so nearly decided half an hour ago) was shaken and disturbed in a very uncomfortable and perplexing way, and were almost grateful to the counsel for the prosecution, when he got up, with a brow of thunder, to demolish the evidence, which was so bewildering when taken in connexion with every thing previously adduced. But if such, without looking to the consequences, was the first impulsive feeling of some among the jury, how shall I tell you the vehemence of passion which possessed the mind of poor Mr. Carson, as he saw the effect of the young sailor's statement. It never shook his belief in Jem's guilt in the least, that attempt at an alibi; his hatred, his longing for vengeance, having once defined an object to itself, could no more bear to be frustated and disappointed, than the beast of prey can submit to have his victim taken from his hungry jaws. No more likeness to the

calm stern power of Jupiter was there in that white eager face almost distorted by its fell anxiety of expression.

The counsel to whom etiquette assigned the cross-examination of Will, caught the look on Mr. Carson's face, and in his desire to further the intense wish there manifested, he over-shot his mark even in his first insulting question:

"And now, my man, you've told the court a very good and very convincing story; no reasonable man ought to doubt the unstained innocence of your relation at the bar. Still there is one circumstance you have forgotten to name; and I feel that without it your evidence is rather incomplete. Will you have the kindness to inform the gentlemen of the jury what has been your charge for repeating this very plausible story? How much good coin of her majesty's realm have you received, or are you to receive, for walking up from the docks, or some less creditable place, and uttering the tale you have just now repeated,—very much to the credit of your instructor, I must say? Remember, sir, you are upon oath."

It took Will a minute to extract the meaning from the garb of unaccustomed words in which it was invested, and during this time he looked a little confused. But the instant the truth flashed upon him, he fixed his bright clear eyes, flaming with indignation, upon the counsellor, whose look fell at last before that stern unflinching gaze. Then, and not till then, Will made answer.

"Will you tell the judge and jury how much money you've been paid for your impudence towards one, who has told God's blessed truth, and who would scorn to tell a lie, or blackguard any one, for the biggest fee as ever lawyer got for doing dirty work. Will you tell, sir?—But I'm ready, my lord judge, to take my oath as many times as your lordship or the jury would like, to testify to things having happened just as I said. There's O'Brien, the pilot, in court now. Would somebody with a wig on please to ask him how much he can say for me ?"

It was a good idea, and caught at by the counsel for the defence. O'Brien gave just such testimony as was required to clear Will from all suspicion. He had witnessed the pursuit, he had heard the conversation which took place between the boat and the ship; he had given Will a homeward passage in his boat. And the character of an accredited pilot, appointed by Trinity House, was known to be above suspicion.

Mr. Carson sank back on his seat in sickening despair. He knew enough of courts to be aware of the extreme unwillingness of juries to convict, even where the evidence is most clear, when the penalty of such conviction is death. At the period of the trial most condemnatory to the prisoner, he had repeated this fact to himself in order to damp his too certain expectation of a conviction. Now it needed not repetition, for it forced itself upon his consciousness, and he seemed to *know*, even before the jury retired to consult, that by some trick, some negligence, some miserable hocus-pocus, the

murderer of his child, his darling, his Absalom, who had never rebelled,—the slayer of his unburied boy would slip through the fangs of justice, and walk free and unscathed over that earth where his son would never more be seen.

It was even so. The prisoner hid his face once more to shield the expression of an emotion he could not control, from the notice of the over-curious; Job Legh ceased his eager talking to Mr. Bridgenorth; Charley looked grave and earnest; for the jury filed one by one back into their box, and the question was asked to which such an awful answer might be given.

The verdict they had come to was unsatisfactory to themselves at last; neither being convinced of his innocence, nor yet quite willing to believe him guilty in the teeth of the alibi. But the punishment that awaited him, if guilty, was so terrible, and so unnatural a sentence for man to pronounce on man, that the knowledge of it had weighed down the scale on the side of innocence, and "Not Guilty" was the verdict that thrilled through the breathless court.

One moment of silence, and then the murmurs rose, as the verdict was discussed by all with lowered voice. Jem stood motionless, his head bowed; poor fellow, he was stunned with the rapid career of events during the last few hours.

He had assumed his place at the bar with little or no expectation of an acquittal; and with scarcely any desire for life, in the complication of occurrences tending to

strengthen the idea of Mary's more than indifference to him ; she had loved another, and in her mind Jem believed that he himself must be regarded as the murderer of him she loved. And suddenly, athwart this gloom which made Life seem such a blank expanse of desolation, there flashed the exquisite delight of hearing Mary's avowal of love, making the future all glorious, if a future in this world he might hope to have. He could not dwell on any thing but her words, telling of her passionate love ; all else was indistinct, nor could he strive to make it otherwise. She loved him.

And Life, now full of tender images, suddenly bright with all exquisite promises, hung on a breath, the slenderest gossamer chance. He tried to think that the knowledge of her love would soothe him even in his dying hours; but the phantoms of what life with her might be, would obtrude, and made him almost gasp and reel under the uncertainty he was enduring. Will's appearance had only added to the intensity of this suspense.

The full meaning of the verdict could not at once penetrate his brain. He stood dizzy and motionless. Some one pulled his coat. He turned, and saw Job Legh, the tears stealing down his brown furrowed cheeks, while he tried in vain to command voice enough to speak. He kept shaking Jem by the hand as the best, and necessary expression of his feeling.

" Here! make yourself scarce! I should think you'd be glad to get out of that!" exclaimed the jailor, as

he brought up another livid prisoner, from out whose eyes came the anxiety which he would not allow any other feature to display.

Job Legh pressed out of court, and Jem followed, unreasoningly.

The crowd made way, and kept their garments tight about them, as Jem passed, for about him there still hung the taint of the murderer.

He was in the open air, and free once more! Although many looked on him with suspicion, faithful friends closed round him ; his arm was unresistingly pumped up and down by his cousin and Job ; when one was tired, the other took up the wholesome exercise, while Ben Sturgis was working off his interest in the scene by scolding Charley for walking on his head round and round Mary's sweetheart, for a sweetheart he was now satisfactorily ascertained to be, in spite of her assertion to the contrary. And all this time Jem himself felt bewildered and dazzled ; he would have given any thing for an hour's uninterrupted thought on the occurrences of the past week, and the new visions raised up during the morning; aye, even though that tranquil hour were to be passed in the hermitage of his quiet prison cell. The first question sobbed out by his choking voice, oppressed with emotion, was,

"Where is she?"

They led him to the room where his mother sat. They had told her of her son's acquittal, and now she was laughing, and crying, and talking, and giving way to all those feelings which she had restrained with such

effort during the last few days. They brought her son to her, and she threw herself upon his neck, weeping there. He returned her embrace, but looked around, beyond. Excepting his mother there was no one in the room, but the friends who had entered with him.

"Eh, lad!" said she, when she found voice to speak. "See what it is to have behaved thysel! I could put in a good word for thee, and the jury could na go and hang thee in the face of th' character I gave thee. Was na it a good thing they did na keep me from Liverpool? But I would come; I knew I could do thee good, bless thee, my lad. But thou'rt very white, and all of a tremble."

He kissed her again and again, but looking round as if searching for some one he could not find, the first words he uttered were still,

"Where is she?"

CHAPTER XVI.

" Fear no more the heat o' th' sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages ;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages."

CYMBELINE.

" While day and night can bring delight,
Or nature aught of pleasure give ;
While joys above my mind can move
For thee, and thee alone I live :

" When that grim foe of joy below
Comes in between to make us part,
The iron hand that breaks our band,
It breaks my bliss—it breaks my heart."

BURNS.

SHE was where no words of peace, no soothing hopeful tidings could reach her ; in the ghastly spectral world of delirium. Hour after hour, day after day, she started up with passionate cries on her father to save Jem ; or rose wildly, imploring the winds and waves, the pitiless winds and waves, to have mercy ; and over and over again she exhausted her feverish fitful strength in these agonised entreaties, and fell back powerless, uttering only the wailing moans of despair.

They told her Jem was safe, they brought him before her eyes ; but sight and hearing were no longer channels of information to that poor distracted brain, nor could human voice penetrate to her understanding.

Jem alone gathered the full meaning of some of her strange sentences, and perceived that by some means or other she, like himself, had divined the truth of her father being the murderer.

Long ago (reckoning time by events and thoughts, and not by clock or dial-plate), Jem had felt certain that Mary's father was Harry Carson's murderer ; and although the motive was in some measure a mystery, yet a whole train of circumstances (the principal of which was that John Barton had borrowed the fatal gun only two days before) had left no doubt in Jem's mind. Sometimes he thought that John had discovered, and thus bloodily resented, the attentions which Mr. Carson had paid to his daughter ; at others, he believed the motive to exist in the bitter feuds between the masters and their work-people, in which Barton was known to take so keen an interest. But if he had felt himself pledged to preserve this secret, even when his own life was the probable penalty, and he believed he should fall, execrated by Mary as the guilty destroyer of her lover, how much more was he bound now to labour to prevent any word of hers from inculpating her father ; now that she was his own ; now that she had braved so much to rescue him ; and now that her poor brain had lost all guiding and controlling power over her words.

All that night long Jem wandered up and down the narrow precincts of Ben Sturgis's house. In the little bed-room where Mrs. Sturgis alternately tended Mary, and wept over the violence of her illness, he listened to her ravings ; each sentence of which had its own peculiar meaning and reference, intelligible to his mind, till her words rose to the wild pitch of agony, that no one could alleviate, and he could bear it no longer, and stole, sick and miserable down stairs, where Ben Sturgis thought it his duty to snore away in an arm-chair instead of his bed, under the idea that he should thus be more ready for active service, such as fetching the doctor to revisit his patient.

Before it was fairly light, Jem (wide-awake, and listening with an earnest attention he could not deaden, however painful its results proved) heard a gentle subdued knock at the house door ; it was no business of his, to be sure, to open it, but as Ben slept on, he thought he would see who the early visitor might be, and ascertain if there was any occasion for disturbing either host or hostess. It was Job Legh who stood there, distinct against the outer light of the street.

"How is she ? Eh ! poor soul ! is that her ! no need to ask ! How strange her voice sounds ! Screech ! screech ! and she so low, sweet-spoken, when she's well ! Thou must keep up heart, old boy, and not look so dismal, thysel."

"I can't help it, Job ; it's past a man's bearing to hear such a one as she is, going on as she is doing ;

even if I did not care for her, it would cut me sore to see one so young, and—I can't speak of it, Job, as a man should do," said Jem, his sobs choking him.

"Let me in, will you?" said Job, pushing past him, for all this time Jem had stood holding the door, unwilling to admit Job where he might hear so much that would be suggestive to one acquainted with the parties that Mary named.

"I'd more than one reason for coming betimes. I wanted to hear how yon poor wench was;—that stood first. Late last night I got a letter from Margaret, very anxious-like. The doctor says the old lady yonder can't last many days longer, and it seems so lonesome for her to die with no one but Margaret and Mrs. Davenport about her. So I thought I'd just come and stay with Mary Barton, and see as she's well done to and you and your mother and Will go and take leave of old Alice."

Jem's countenance, sad at best just now, fell lower and lower. But Job went on with his speech.

"She still wanders, Margaret says, and thinks she's with her mother at home; but for all that, she should have some kith and kin near her to close her eyes, to my thinking."

"Could not you and Will take mother home? I'd follow when—" Jem faltered out thus far, when Job interrupted,

"Lad! if thou knew what thy mother has suffered for thee, thou'd not speak of leaving her just when she's got thee from the grave as it were. Why, this very

night she roused me up, and 'Job,' says she, 'I ask your pardon for wakening you, but tell me, am I awake or dreaming? Is Jem proved innocent? Oh, Job Legh! God send I've not been only dreaming it!' For thou see'st she can't rightly understand why thou'rt with Mary, and not with her. Ay, ay! I know why; but a mother only gives up her son's heart inch by inch to his wife, and then gives it up with a grudge. No, Jem! thou must go with thy mother just now, if ever thou hopest for God's blessing. She's a widow, and has none but thee. Never fear for Mary! She's young and will struggle through. They are decent people, these folk she is with, and I'll watch o'er her, as though she was my own poor girl, that lies cold enough in London-town. I grant ye, it's hard enough for her to be left among strangers. To my mind John Barton would be more in the way of his duty, looking after his daughter, than delegating it up and down the country, looking after every one's business but his own."

A new idea and a new fear came into Jem's mind. What if Mary should implicate her father?

"She raves terribly," said he. "All night long she's been speaking of her father, and mixing up thoughts of him with the trial she saw yesterday. I should not wonder if she'll speak of him as being in court next thing."

"I should na' wonder, either," answered Job. "Folk in her way say many and many a strange thing; and th' best way is never to mind them. Now

you take your mother home, Jem, and stay by her till old Alice is gone, and trust me for seeing after Mary."

Jem felt how right Job was, and could not resist what he knew to be his duty, but I cannot tell you how heavy and sick at heart he was as he stood at the door to take a last, fond, lingering look at Mary; he saw her sitting up in bed, her golden hair, dimmed with her one day's illness, floating behind her, her head bound round with wetted cloths, her features all agitated, even to distortion, with the pangs of her anxiety.

Her lover's eyes filled with tears. He could not hope. The elasticity of his heart had been crushed out of him by early sorrows; and now, especially, the dark side of every thing seemed to be presented to him. What if she died, just when he knew the treasure, the untold treasure he possessed in her love! What if (worse than death) she remained a poor gibbering maniac all her life long (and mad people do live to be old sometimes, even under all the pressure of their burden), terror-distracted as she was now; and no one able to comfort her!

"Jem!" said Job, partly guessing the other's feelings by his own. "Jem!" repeated he, arresting his attention before he spoke. Jem turned round, the little motion causing the tears to overflow and trickle down his cheeks. "Thou must trust in God, and leave her in His hands." He spoke hushed, and low; but the words sank all the more into Jem's heart, and gave him strength to tear himself away.

He found his mother (notwithstanding that she had

but just regained her child through Mary's instrumentality) half inclined to resent his having passed the night in anxious devotion to the poor invalid. She dwelt on the duties of children to their parents (above all others), till Jem could hardly believe the relative positions they had held only yesterday, when she was struggling with and controlling every instinct of her nature, only because *he* wished it. However, the recollection of that yesterday, with its hair's breadth between him and a felon's death, and the love that had lightened the dark shadow, made him bear with the meekness and patience of a true-hearted man all the worrying little acerbities of to-day; and he had no small merit in so doing; for in him, as in his mother, the re-action after intense excitement had produced its usual effect in increased irritability of the nervous system.

They found Alice alive, and without pain. And that was all. A child of a few weeks old would have had more bodily strength; a child of a very few months old, more consciousness of what was passing before her. But even in this state she diffused an atmosphere of peace around her. True, Will, at first, wept passionate tears at the sight of her, who had been as a mother to him, so standing on the confines of life. But even now, as always, loud passionate feeling could not long endure in the calm of her presence. The firm faith which her mind had no longer power to grasp, had left its trail of glory; for by no other word can I call the bright happy look which illumined the old earth-worn face. Her talk, it is true, bore no more that con-

stant earnest reference to God and his holy word which it had done in health, and there were no death-bed words of exhortation from the lips of one so habitually pious. For still she imagined herself once again in the happy, happy realms of childhood; and again dwelling in the lovely northern haunts where she had so often longed to be. Though earthly sight was gone away, she beheld again the scenes she had loved from long years ago! she saw them without a change to dim the old radiant hues. The long dead were with her, fresh and blooming as in those bygone days. And death came to her as a welcome blessing, like as evening comes to the weary child. Her work here was finished, and faithfully done.

What better sentence can an emperor wish to have said over his bier? In second childhood (that blessing clouded by a name), she said her "Nunc Dimittis,"—the sweetest canticle to the holy.

"Mother, good night! Dear mother! bless me once more! I'm very tired, and would fain go to sleep." She never spoke again on this side Heaven.

She died the day after their return from Liverpool. From that time, Jem became aware that his mother was jealously watching for some word or sign which should betoken his wish to return to Mary. And yet go to Liverpool he must and would, as soon as the funeral was over, if but for a single glimpse at his darling. For Job had never written; indeed, any necessity for his so doing had never entered his head. If Mary died, he would announce it personally; if she recovered, he

meant to bring her home with him. Writing was to him little more than an auxiliary to natural history; a way of ticketing specimens, not of expressing thoughts.

The consequence of this want of all intelligence as to Mary's state was, that Jem was constantly anticipating that every person and every scrap of paper was to convey to him the news of her death. He could not endure this state long; but he resolved not to disturb the house by announcing to his mother his proposed intention of returning to Liverpool, until the dead had been carried forth.

On Sunday afternoon, they laid her low with many tears. Will wept as one who would not be comforted.

The old childish feeling came over him, the feeling of loneliness at being left among strangers.

By and bye, Margaret timidly stole near him, as if waiting to console; and soon his passion sank down to grief, and grief gave way to melancholy, and though he felt as though he never could be joyful again, he was all the while unconsciously approaching nearer to the full happiness of calling Margaret his own, and a golden thread was interwoven even now with the darkness of his sorrow. Yet it was on his arm that Jane Wilson leant on her return homewards. Jem took charge of Margaret.

"Margaret, I'm bound for Liverpool by the first train to-morrow; I must set your grandfather at liberty."

"I'm sure he likes nothing better than watching over poor Mary; he loves her nearly as well as me. But

let me go! I have been so full of poor Alice, I've never thought of it before ; I can't do so much as many a one, but Mary will like to have a woman about her that she knows. I'm sorry I waited to be reminded, Jem!" replied Margaret, with some little self-reproach.

But Margaret's proposition did not at all agree with her companion's wishes. He found he had better speak out, and put his intention at once to the right motive; the subterfuge about setting Job Legh at liberty had done him harm instead of good.

"To tell truth, Margaret, it's I that's must go, and that for my own sake, not your grandfather's. I can rest neither by night nor day for thinking on Mary. Whether she lives or dies I look on her as my wife before God, as surely and solemnly as if we were married. So being, I have the greatest right to look after her, and I cannot yield it even to—"

"Her father," said Margaret, finishing his interrupted sentence. "It seems strange that a girl like her should be thrown on the bare world to struggle through so bad an illness. No one seems to know where John Barton is, else I thought of getting Morris to write him a letter telling him about Mary. I wish he was home, that I do!"

Jem could not echo this wish.

"Mary's not bad off for friends where she is," said he. "I call them friends, though a week ago we none of us knew there were such folks in the world. But being anxious and sorrowful about the same thing makes

people friends quicker than any thing, I think. She's like a mother to Mary in her ways; and he bears a good character, as far as I could learn just in that hurry. We're drawing near home, and I've not said my say, Margaret. I want you to look after mother a bit. She'll not like my going, and I've got to break it to her yet. If she takes it very badly, I'll come back to-morrow night; but if she's not against it very much, I mean to stay till it's settled about Mary, one way or the other. Will, you know, will be there, Margaret, to help a bit in doing for mother."

Will's being there made the only objection Margaret saw to this plan. She disliked the idea of seeming to throw herself in his way; and yet she did not like to say any thing of this feeling to Jem, who had all along seemed perfectly unconscious of any love-affair, besides his own, in progress.

So Margaret gave a reluctant consent.

"If you can just step up to our house to-night, Jem, I'll put up a few things as may be useful to Mary, and then you can say when you'll likely be back. If you come home to-morrow night, and Will's there, perhaps I need not step up?"

"Yes, Margaret, do! I shan't leave easy unless you go some time in the day to see mother. I'll come to-night, though; and now good-bye. Stay! do you think you could just coax poor Will to walk a bit home with you, that I might speak to mother by myself?"

No! that Margaret could not do. That was expecting too great a sacrifice of bashful feeling.

But the object was accomplished by Will's going upstairs immediately on their return to the house, to indulge his mournful thoughts alone. As soon as Jem and his mother were left by themselves, he began on the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Mother!"

She put her handkerchief from her eyes, and turned quickly round so as to face him where he stood, thinking what best to say. The little action annoyed him, and he rushed at once into the subject.

"Mother! I am going back to Liverpool to-morrow morning to see how Mary Barton is."

"And what's Mary Barton to thee, that thou shouldst be running after her in that-a-way?"

"If she lives, she shall be my wedded wife. If she dies—mother, I can't speak of what I shall feel if she dies." His voice was choked in his throat.

For an instant his mother was interested by his words; and then came back the old jealousy of being supplanted in the affections of that son, who had been, as it were, newly born to her, by the escape he had so lately experienced from danger. So she hardened her heart against entertaining any feeling of sympathy; and turned away from the face, which recalled the earnest look of his childhood, when he had come to her in some trouble, sure of help and comfort.

And coldly she spoke, in those tones which Jem knew and dreaded, even before the meaning they expressed was fully shaped. "Thou'rt old enough to please thysel. Old mothers are cast aside, and what they've borne forgotten

as soon as a pretty face comes across. I might have thought of that last Tuesday, when I felt as if thou wert all my own, and the judge were some wild animal trying to rend thee from me. I spoke up for thee then; but it's all forgotten now, I suppose."

"Mother! you know all this while, *you know* I can never forget any kindness you've ever done for me; and they've been many. Why should you think I've only room for one love in my heart? I can love you as dearly as ever, and Mary too, as much as man ever loved woman."

He awaited a reply. None was vouchsafed.

"Mother, answer me!" said he, at last.

"What mun I answer? You asked me no question."

"Well! I ask you this now. To-morrow morning I go to Liverpool to see her, who is as my wife. Dear mother! will you bless me on my errand? If it please God she recovers, will you take her to you as you would a daughter?"

She could neither refuse, nor assent.

"Why need you go?" said she querulously, at length. "You'll be getting in some mischief or another, again. Can't you stop at home quiet with me?"

Jem got up, and walked about the room in despairing impatience. She would not understand his feelings. At last he stopped right before the place where she was sitting, with an air of injured meekness on her face.

"Mother! I often think what a good man father was! I've often heard you tell of your courting days;

and of the accident that befell you, and how ill you were. How long is it ago ?"

"Near upon five-and-twenty years," said she, with a sigh.

"You little thought when you were so ill you should live to have such a fine strapping son as I am, did you now ?"

She smiled a little, and looked up at him, which was just what he wanted.

"Thou'rt not so fine a man as thy father was, by a deal!" said she, looking at him with much fondness, notwithstanding her depreciatory words.

He took another turn or two up and down the room. He wanted to bend the subject round to his own case.

"Those were happy days when father was alive!"

"You may say so, lad! Such days as will never come again to me, at any rate." She sighed sorrowfully.

"Mother!" said he, at last, stopping short, and taking her hand in his with tender affection, "you'd like me to be as happy a man as my father was before me, would not you? You'd like me to have some one to make me as happy as you made father ? Now, would not you, dear mother ?"

"I did not make him as happy as I might ha' done," murmured she, in a low, sad voice of self-reproach. "Th' accident gave a jar to my temper it's never got the better of; and now he's gone, where he can never know how I grieve for having frabbed him as I did."

"Nay, mother, we don't know that!" said Jem, with gentle soothing. "Any how, you and father got along with as few rubs as most people. But for *his* sake, dear mother, don't say me nay, now that I come to you to ask your blessing before setting out to see her, who is to be my wife, if ever woman is; for *his* sake, if not for mine, love her who I shall bring home to be to me all you were to him: and mother! I do not ask for a truer, or a tenderer heart than yours is, in the long run."

The hard look left her face; though her eyes were still averted from Jem's gaze, it was more because they were brimming over with tears, called forth by his words, than because any angry feeling yet remained. And when his manly voice died away in low pleadings, she lifted up her hands, and bent down her son's head below the level of her own; and then she solemnly uttered a blessing.

"God bless thee, Jem, my own dear lad. And may He bless Mary Barton for thy sake."

Jem's heart leaped up, and from this time hope took the place of fear in his anticipations with regard to Mary.

"Mother! you show your own true self to Mary, and she'll love you as dearly as I do."

So with some few smiles, and some few tears, and much earnest talking, the evening wore away.

"I must be off to see Margaret. Why, it's near ten o'clock! Could you have thought it? Now don't you stop up for me, mother. You and Will go to bed,

for you've both need of it. I shall be home in an hour."

Margaret had felt the evening long and lonely; and was all but giving up the thoughts of Jem's coming that night, when she heard his step at the door.

He told her of his progress with his mother; he told her his hopes, and was silent on the subject of his fears.

"To think how sorrow and joy are mixed up together. You'll date your start in life as Mary's acknowledged lover from poor Alice Wilson's burial day. Well! the dead are soon forgotten!"

"Dear Margaret!—But you're worn out with your long evening waiting for me. I don't wonder. But never you, nor any one else, think because God sees fit to call up new interests, perhaps right out of the grave, that therefore the dead are forgotten. Margaret, you yourself can remember our looks, and fancy what we're like."

"Yes! but what has that to do with remembering Alice?"

"Why, just this. You're not always trying to think on our faces, and making a labour of remembering; but often, I'll be bound, when you're sinking off to sleep, or when you're very quiet and still, the faces you knew so well when you could see, come smiling before you with loving looks. Or you remember them, without striving after it, and without thinking it's your duty to keep recalling them. And so it is with them

that are hidden from our sight. If they've been worthy to be heartily loved while alive, they'll not be forgotten when dead ; it's against nature. And we need no more be upbraiding ourselves for letting in God's rays of light upon our sorrow, and no more be fearful of forgetting them, because their memory is not always haunting and taking up our minds, than you need to trouble yourself about remembering your grandfather's face, or what the stars were like,—you can't forget if you would, what it's such a pleasure to think about. Don't fear my forgetting Aunt Alice."

"I'm not, Jem ; not now, at least ; only you seemed so full about Mary."

"I've kept it down so long, remember. How glad Aunt Alice would have been to know that I might hope to have her for my wife! that's to say if God spares her!"

"She would not have known it, even if you could have told her this last fortnight,—ever since you went away she's been thinking always that she was a little child at her mother's apron-string. She must have been a happy little thing ; it was such a pleasure to her to think about those early days, when she lay old and gray on her death-bed."

"I never knew any one seem more happy all her life long."

"Ay! and how gentle and easy her death was! she thought her mother was near her."

They fell into calm thought about those last peaceful happy hours.

It struck eleven. Jem started up.

"I should have been gone long ago. Give me the bundle. You'll not forget my mother. Good night, Margaret."

She let him out and bolted the door behind him. He stood on the steps to adjust some fastening about the bundle. The court, the street, was deeply still. Long ago had all retired to rest on that quiet Sabbath evening. The stars shone down on the silent deserted streets, and the soft clear moonlight fell in bright masses, leaving the steps on which Jem stood in shadow.

A foot-fall was heard along the pavement; slow and heavy was the sound. Before Jem had ended his little piece of business, a form had glided into sight; a wan, feeble figure, bearing, with evident and painful labour, a jug of water from the neighbouring pump. It went before Jem, turned up the court at the corner of which he was standing, passed into the broad, calm light; and there, with bowed head, sinking and shrunk body, Jem recognised John Barton.

No haunting ghost could have had less of the energy of life in its involuntary motions than he, who, nevertheless, went on with the same measured clock-work tread, until the door of his own house was reached. And then he disappeared, and the latch fell feebly to, and made a faint and wavering sound, breaking the solemn silence of the night. Then all again was still.

For a minute or two Jem stood motionless, stunned by the thoughts which the sight of Mary's father had called up.

Margaret did not know he was at home: had he stolen like a thief by dead of night into his own dwelling? Depressed as Jem had often and long seen him, this night there was something different about him still; beaten down by some inward storm, he seemed to grovel along, all self-respect lost and gone.

Must he be told of Mary's state? Jem felt he must not; and this for many reasons. He could not be informed of her illness, without many other particulars being communicated at the same time, of which it were better he should be kept in ignorance; indeed, of which Mary herself could alone give the full explanation. No suspicion that he was the criminal seemed hitherto to have been excited in the mind of any one. Added to these reasons was Jem's extreme unwillingness to face him, with the belief in his breast that he, and none other, had done the fearful deed.

It was true that he was Mary's father, and as such, had every right to be told of all concerning her; but supposing he were, and that he followed the impulse so natural to a father, and wished to go to her, what might be the consequences? Among the mingled feelings she had revealed in her delirium, ay, mingled even with the most tender expressions of love for her father, was a sort of horror of him; a dread of him as a blood-shedder, which seemed to separate him into two persons,—one, the father who had dandled her on his knee, and loved her all her life long; the other, the assassin, the cause of all her trouble and woe.

If he presented himself before her while this idea

of his character was uppermost, who might tell the consequence ?

Jem could not, and would not, expose her to any such fearful chance : and to tell the truth, I believe he looked upon her as more his own, to guard from all shadow of injury with most loving care, than as belonging to any one else in this world, though girt with the reverent name of Father, and guiltless of aught that might have lessened such reverence.

If you think this account of mine confused, of the half-feelings, half-reasons, which passed through Jem's mind, as he stood gazing at the empty space, where that crushed form had so lately been seen,—if you are perplexed to disentangle the real motives, I do assure you it was from just such an involved set of thoughts that Jem drew the resolution to act as if he had not seen that phantom likeness of John Barton ; himself, yet not himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

"*Dixwell.* Forgiveness! Oh, forgiveness, and a grave!
Mary. God knows thy heart, my father! and I shudder
To think what thou perchance hast acted.
Dixwell. Oh!
Mary. No common load of woe is thine, my father."
ELLIOTT'S 'KERHONAH.'

MARY still hovered between life and death when Jem arrived at the house where she lay; and the doctors were as yet unwilling to compromise their wisdom by allowing too much hope to be entertained. But the state of things, if not less anxious, was less distressing than when Jem had quitted her. She lay now in a stupor, which was partly disease, and partly exhaustion after the previous excitement.

And now Jem found the difficulty which every one who has watched by a sick bed knows full well; and which is perhaps more insurmountable to men than it is to women,—the difficulty of being patient, and trying not to expect any visible change for long, long hours of sad monotony.

But after awhile the reward came. The laboured

breathing became lower and softer, the heavy look of oppressive pain melted away from the face, and a languor that was almost peace took the place of suffering. She slept a natural sleep ; and they stole about on tip-toe, and spoke low, and softly, and hardly dared to breathe, however much they longed to sigh out their thankful relief.

She opened her eyes. Her mind was in the tender state of a lately-born infant's. She was pleased with the gay but not dazzling colours of the paper ; soothed by the subdued light; and quite sufficiently amused by looking at all the objects in the room,—the drawing of the ships, the festoons of the curtain, the bright flowers on the painted backs of the chairs,—to care for any stronger excitement. She wondered at the ball of glass, containing various coloured sands from the Isle of Wight, or some such place, which hung suspended from the middle of the little valance over the window. But she did not care to exert herself to ask any questions, although she saw Mrs. Sturgis standing at the bed-side with some tea, ready to drop it into her mouth by spoonfuls.

She did not see the face of honest joy, of earnest thankfulness,—the clasped hands,—the beaming eyes, —the trembling eargerness of gesture, of one who had long awaited her wakening, and who now stood behind the curtains watching through some little chink her every faint motion ; or if she had caught a glimpse of that loving, peeping face, she was in too exhausted a state to have taken much notice, or have long retained

the impression that he she loved so well, was hanging about her, and blessing God for every conscious look which stole over her countenance.

She fell softly into slumber, without a word having been spoken by any one during that half hour of inexpressible joy. And again the stillness was enforced by sign and whispered word, but with eyes that beamed out their bright thoughts of hope. Jem sat by the side of the bed, holding back the little curtain, and gazing as if he could never gaze his fill at the pale wasted face, so marbled and so chiselled in its wan outline.

She wakened once more; her soft eyes opened, and met his over-bending look. She smiled gently, as a baby does when it sees its mother tending its little cot; and continued her innocent, infantine gaze into his face, as if the sight gave her much unconscious pleasure. But by-and-by a different expression came into her sweet eyes; a look of memory and intelligence; her white face flushed the brightest rosy red, and with feeble motion she tried to hide her head in the pillow.

It required all Jem's self-control to do what he knew and felt to be necessary, to call Mrs. Sturgis who was quietly dozing by the fireside; and that done, he felt almost obliged to leave the room to keep down the happy agitation which would gush out in every feature, every gesture, and every tone.

From that time forward, Mary's progress towards health was rapid.

There was every reason, but one, in favour of her speedy removal home. All Jem's duties lay in Man-

chester. It was his mother's dwelling-place, and there his plans for life had been to be worked out ; plans, which the suspicion and imprisonment he had fallen into, had thrown for a time into a chaos, which his presence was required to arrange into form. For he might find, in spite of a jury's verdict, that too strong a taint was on his character for him ever to labour in Manchester again. He remembered the manner in which some one suspected of having been a convict was shunned by masters and men, when he had accidentally met with work in their foundry ; the recollection smote him now, how he himself had thought that it did not become an honest upright man to associate with one who had been a prisoner. He could not choose but think on that poor humble being, with his downcast conscious look ; hunted out of the work-shop, where he had sought to earn an honest livelihood, by the looks, and half-spoken words, and the black silence of repugnance (worse than words to bear), that met him on all sides.

Jem felt that his own character had been attainted ; and that to many it might still appear suspicious. He knew that he could convince the world, by a future as blameless as his past had been, that he was innocent. But at the same time he saw that he must have patience, and nerve himself for some trials ; and the sooner these were undergone, the sooner he was aware of the place he held in men's estimation, the better. He longed to have presented himself once more at the foundry ; and then the reality would drive away the pictures that would (unbidden) come, of a shunned

man, eyed askance by all, and driven forth to shape out some new career.

I said every reason "but one" inclined Jem to hasten Mary's return as soon as she was sufficiently convalescent. That one was the meeting which awaited her at home.

Turn it over as Jem would, he could not decide what was the best course to pursue. He could compel himself to any line of conduct that his reason and his sense of right told him to be desirable; but they did not tell him it was desirable to speak to Mary, in her tender state of mind and body, of her father. How much would be implied by the mere mention of his name! Speak it as calmly, and as indifferently as he might, he could not avoid expressing some consciousness of the terrible knowledge she possessed.

She, for her part, was softer and gentler than she had ever been in her gentlest mood; since her illness, her motions, her glances, her voice were all tender in their languor. It seemed almost a trouble to her to break the silence with the low sounds of her own sweet voice, and her words fell sparingly on Jem's greedy, listening ear.

Her face was, however, so full of love and confidence, that Jem felt no uneasiness at the state of silent abstraction into which she often fell. If she did but love him, all would yet go right; and it was better not to press for confidence on that one subject which must be painful to both.

There came a fine, bright, balmy day. And Mary

tottered once more out into the open air, leaning on Jem's arm, and close to his beating heart. And Mrs. Sturgis watched them from her door, with a blessing on her lips, as they went slowly up the street.

They came in sight of the river. Mary shuddered.

"Oh, Jem! take me home. Yon river seems all made of glittering, heaving, dazzling metal, just as it did when I began to be ill."

Jem led her homewards. She drooped her head as searching for something on the ground.

"Jem!" He was all attention. She paused for an instant. "When may I go home? To Manchester, I mean. I am so weary of this place; and I would fain be at home."

She spoke in a feeble voice; not at all impatiently, as the written words would seem to intimate, but in a mournful way, as if anticipating sorrow even in the very fulfilment of her wishes.

"Darling! we will go whenever you wish; whenever you feel strong enough. I asked Job to tell Margaret to get all in readiness for you to go there at first. She'll tend you, and nurse you. You must not go home. Job proffered for you to go there."

"Ah! but I must go home, Jem. I'll try and not fail now in what's right. There are things we must not speak on" (lowering her voice), "but you'll be really kind if you'll not speak against my going home. Let us say no more about it, dear Jem. I must go home, and I must go alone."

"Not alone, Mary!"

"Yes, alone! I cannot tell you why I ask it. And if you guess, I know you well enough to be sure you'll understand why I ask you never to speak on that again to me, till I begin. Promise, dear Jem, promise!"

He promised; to gratify that beseeching face he promised. And then he repented, and felt as if he had done ill. Then again he felt as if she were the best judge, and knowing all (perhaps more than even he did) might be forming plans, which his interference would mar.

One thing was certain! it was a miserable thing to have this awful forbidden ground of discourse; to guess at each other's thoughts, when eyes were averted, and cheeks blanched, and words stood still, arrested in their flow by some casual allusion.

At last a day, fine enough for Mary to travel on, arrived. She had wished to go, but now her courage failed her. How could she have said she was weary of that quiet house, where even Ben Sturgis' grumblings only made a kind of harmonious bass in the concord between him and his wife, so thoroughly did they know each other with the knowledge of many years! How could she have longed to quit that little peaceful room where she had experienced such loving tendence! Even the very check bed-curtains became dear to her, under the idea of seeing them no more. If it was so with inanimate objects, if they had such power of exciting regret, what were her feelings with regard to the kind old couple, who had taken the stranger in, and cared for her, and nursed her, as though she had

been a daughter? Each wilful sentence spoken in the half unconscious irritation of feebleness came now with avenging self-reproach to her memory, as she hung about Mrs. Sturgis, with many tears, which served instead of words to express her gratitude and love.

Ben bustled about with the square bottle of Goldenwasser in one of his hands, and a small tumbler in the other; he went to Mary, Jem, and his wife in succession, pouring out a glass for each and bidding them drink it to keep their spirits up: but as each severally refused, he drank it himself; and passed on to offer the same hospitality to another with the like refusal, and the like result.

When he had swallowed the last of the three draughts, he condescended to give his reasons for having done so.

"I cannot abide waste. What's poured out mun be drunk. That's my maxim." So saying, he replaced the bottle in the cupboard.

It was he, who in a firm commanding voice at last told Jem and Mary to be off, or they would be too late. Mrs. Sturgis had kept up till then; but as they left her house, she could no longer restrain her tears, and cried aloud in spite of her husband's upbraiding.

"Perhaps they'll be too late for th' train!" exclaimed she, with a degree of hope, as the clock struck two.

"What! and come back again! No! no! that would never do. We've done our part, and cried our cry; it's no use going o'er the same ground again.

I should ha' to give 'em more out of yon bottle when next parting time came, and them three glasses they had made a hole in the stuff, I can tell you. Time Jack was back from Hamburgh with some more."

When they reached Manchester, Mary looked very white, and the expression on her face was almost stern. She was in fact summoning up her resolution to meet her father if he were at home. Jem had never named his midnight glimpse of John Barton to human being; but Mary had a sort of presentiment that wander where he would, he would seek his home at last. But in what mood she dreaded to think. For the knowledge of her father's capability of guilt seemed to have opened a dark gulf in his character, into the depths of which she trembled to look. At one moment she would fain have claimed protection against the life she must lead, for some time at least, alone with a murderer! She thought of his gloom, before his mind was haunted by the memory of so terrible a crime; his moody irritable ways. She imagined the evenings as of old: she, toiling at some work, long after houses were shut, and folks abed; he, more savage than he had ever been before with the inward gnawing of his remorse. At such times she could have cried aloud with terror, at the scenes her fancy conjured up.

But her filial duty, nay, her love and gratitude for many deeds of kindness done to her as a little child, conquered all fear. She would endure all imaginable terrors, although of daily occurrence. And she would

patiently bear all wayward violence of temper; more than patiently would she bear it—pitifully, as one who knew of some awful curse awaiting the blood-shedder. She would watch over him tenderly, as the Innocent should watch over the Guilty; awaiting the gracious seasons, wherein to pour oil and balm into the bitter wounds.

With the untroubled peace which the resolve to endure to the end gives, she approached the house that from habit she still called home, but which possessed the holiness of home no longer.

"Jem!" said she, as they stood at the entrance to the court, close by Job Legh's door, "You must go in there; and wait half-an-hour. Not less. If, in that time I don't come back, you go your ways to your mother. Give her my dear love. I will send by Margaret when I want to see you." She sighed heavily.

"Mary! Mary! I cannot leave you. You speak as coldly as if we were to be nought to each other. And my heart's bound up in you. I know why you bid me keep away, but—"

She put her hand on his arm, as he spoke in a loud agitated tone; she looked into his face with upbraiding love in her eyes, and then she said, while her lips quivered, and he felt her whole frame trembling:

"Dear Jem! I often could have told you more of love, if I had not once spoken out so free. Remember that time, Jem, if ever you think me cold. Then,

the love that's in my heart would out in words; but now, though I'm silent on the pain I'm feeling in quitting you, the love is in my heart all the same. But this is not the time to speak on such things. If I do not do what I feel to be right now, I may blame myself all my life long! Jem, you promised—"

And so saying she left him. She went quicker than she would otherwise have passed over those few yards of ground, for fear he should still try to accompany her. Her hand was on the latch, and in a breath the door was opened.

There sat her father, still and motionless. Not even turning his head to see who had entered; but perhaps he recognised the foot-step,—the trick of action.

He sat by the fire; the grate I should say, for fire there was none. Some dull, gray ashes, negligently left, long days ago, coldly choked up the bars. He had taken the accustomed seat from mere force of habit, which ruled his automaton-body. For all energy, both physical and mental, seemed to have retreated inwards to some of the great citadels of life, there to do battle against the Destroyer, Conscience.

His hands were crossed, his fingers interlaced; usually a position implying some degree of resolution, or strength; but in him it was so faintly maintained, that it appeared more the result of chance; an attitude requiring some application of outward force to alter,—and a blow with a straw seemed as though it would be sufficient.

And as for his face it was sunk and worn,—like a skull, with yet a suffering expression that skulls have not! Your heart would have ached to have seen the man, however hardly you might have judged his crime.

But crime and all was forgotten by his daughter, as she saw his abashed look, his smitten helplessness. All along she had felt it difficult (as I may have said before) to reconcile the two ideas, of her father and a blood-shedder. But now it was impossible. He was her father! her own dear father! and in his sufferings, whatever their cause, more dearly loved than ever before. His crime was a thing apart, never more to be considered by her.

And tenderly did she treat him, and fondly did she serve him in every way that heart could devise, or hand execute.

She had some money about her, the price of her strange services as a witness; and when the lingering dusk drew on, she stole out to effect some purchases necessary for her father's comfort.

For how body and soul had been kept together, even as much as they were, during the days he had dwelt alone, no one can say. The house was bare as when Mary had left it, of coal, or of candle, of food, or of blessing in any shape.

She came quickly home; but as she passed Job Legh's door, she stopped. Doubtless Jem had long since gone; and doubtless too, he had given Margaret some good reason for not intruding upon her friend for

this night at least, otherwise Mary would have seen her before now.

But to-morrow,—would she not come in to-morrow? And who so quick as blind Margaret in noticing tones, and sighs, and even silence?

She did not give herself time for further thought, her desire to be once more with her father was too pressing; but she opened the door, before she well knew what to say.

"It's Mary Barton! I know her by her breathing! Grandfather, it's Mary Barton!"

Margaret's joy at meeting her, the open demonstration of her love, affected Mary much; she could not keep from crying, and sat down weak and agitated on the first chair she could find.

"Ay, ay, Mary! thou'rt looking a bit different to when I saw thee last. Thou'lt give Jem and me good characters for sick nurses, I trust. If all trades fail, I'll turn to that. Jem's place is for life, I reckon. Nay, never redden so, lass. You and he know each other's minds by this time!"

Margaret held her hand, and gently smiled into her face.

Job Legh took the candle up, and began a leisurely inspection.

"Thou hast getten a bit of pink in thy cheeks,—not much; but when last I saw thee, thy lips were as white as a sheet. Thy nose is sharpish at th' end; thou'rt more like thy father than ever thou wert before.

Lord! child, what's the matter? Art thou going to faint?"

For Mary had sickened at the mention of that name; yet she felt that now or never was the time to speak.

"Father's come home!" she said, "but he's very poorly; I never saw him as he is now, before. I asked Jem not to come near him for fear it might fidget him."

She spoke hastily, and (to her own idea) in an unnatural manner. But they did not seem to notice it, nor to take the hint she had thrown out of company being unacceptable; for Job Legh directly put down some insect, which he was impaling on a corking-pin, and exclaimed,

"Thy father come home! Why, Jem never said a word of it! And ailing too! I'll go in, and cheer him with a bit of talk. I ne'er knew any good come of delegating it."

"Oh, Job! father cannot stand—father is too ill. Don't come; not but that you're very kind and good; but to-night—indeed," said she, at last, in despair, seeing Job still persevere in putting away his things; "you must not come till I send or come for you. Father's in that strange way, I can't answer for it if he sees strangers. Please don't come. I'll come and tell you every day how he goes on. I must be off now to see after him. Dear Job! kind Job! don't be angry with me. If you knew all you'd pity me."

For Job was muttering away in high dudgeon, and

even Margaret's tone was altered as she wished Mary good night. Just then she could ill brook coldness from any one, and least of all bear the idea of being considered ungrateful by so kind and zealous a friend as Job had been; so she turned round suddenly, even when her hand was on the latch of the door, and ran back, and threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him first, and then Margaret. And then, the tears fast-falling down her cheeks, but no word spoken, she hastily left the house, and went back to her home.

There was no change in her father's position, or in his spectral look. He had answered her questions (but few in number, for so many subjects were unapproachable) by monosyllables, and in a weak, high, childish voice; but he had not lifted his eyes; he could not meet his daughter's look. And she, when she spoke, or as she moved about, avoided letting her eyes rest upon him. She wished to be her usual self; but while every thing was done with a consciousness of purpose, she felt it was impossible.

In this manner things went on for some days. At night he feebly clambered up stairs to bed; and during those long dark hours Mary heard those groans of agony, which never escaped his lips by day; when they were compressed in silence over his inward woe.

Many a time she sat up listening, and wondering if it would ease his miserable heart if she went to him, and told him she knew all, and loved and pitied him more than words could tell.

By day the monotonous hours wore on in the same heavy, hushed manner as on that first dreary afternoon. He ate,—but without relish; and food seemed no longer to nourish him, for each morning his face had caught more of the ghastly fore-shadowing of Death.

The neighbours kept strangely aloof. Of late years John Barton had had a repellent power about him, felt by all, except to the few who had either known him in his better and happier days, or those to whom he had given his sympathy and his confidence. People did not care to enter the doors of one, whose very depth of thoughtfulness rendered him moody and stern. And now they contented themselves with a kind inquiry when they saw Mary in her goings-out or in her comings-in. With her oppressing knowledge, she imagined their reserved conduct stranger than it was in reality. She missed Job and Margaret too; who, in all former times of sorrow or anxiety since their acquaintance first began, had been ready with their sympathy.

But most of all she missed the delicious luxury she had lately enjoyed in having Jem's tender love at hand every hour of the day, to ward off every wind of heaven, and every disturbing thought.

She knew he was often hovering about the house; though the knowledge seemed to come more by intuition, than by any positive sight or sound for the first day or two. On the third, she met him at Job Legh's.

They received her with every effort of cordiality; but still there was a cobweb-veil of separation between them, to which Mary was morbidly acute. While in Jem's voice, and eyes, and manner, there was every evidence of most passionate, most admiring, and most trusting love. The trust was shown by his respectful silence on that one point of reserve on which she had interdicted conversation.

He left Job Legh's house when she did. They lingered on the step; he holding her hand between both of his, as loth to let her go, he questioned her as to when he should see her again.

"Mother does so want to see you," whispered he. "Can you come to see her to-morrow? or when?"

"I cannot tell," replied she, softly. "Not yet. Wait awhile; perhaps only a little while. Dear Jem, I must go to him,—dearest Jem."

The next day, the fourth from Mary's return home, as she was sitting near the window, sadly dreaming over some work, she caught a glimpse of the last person she wished to see—of Sally Leadbitter!

She was evidently coming to their house; another moment, and she tapped at the door. John Barton gave an anxious, uneasy side-glance. Mary knew that if she delayed answering the knock, Sally would not scruple to enter; so as hastily as if the visit had been desired, she opened the door, and stood there with the latch in her hand, barring up all entrance, and as much as possible obstructing all curious glances into the interior.

"Well, Mary Barton! You're home at last! I heard you'd gotten home; so I thought I'd just step over and hear the news."

She was bent on coming in, and saw Mary's preventive design. So she stood on tip-toe, looking over Mary's shoulders into the room where she suspected a lover to be lurking; but instead, she saw only the figure of the stern gloomy father she had always been in the habit of avoiding; and she dropped down again, content to carry on the conversation where Mary chose, and as Mary chose, in whispers.

"So the old governor is back again, eh? And what does he say to all your fine doings at Liverpool, and before?—you and I know where. You can't hide it now, Mary, for it's all in print."

Mary gave a low moan,—and then implored Sally to change the subject; for unpleasant as it always was, it was doubly unpleasant in the manner in which she was treating it. If they had been alone, Mary would have borne it patiently,—or so she thought,—but now she felt almost certain her father was listening; there was a subdued breathing, a slight bracing-up of the listless attitude. But there was no arresting Sally's curiosity to hear all she could respecting the adventures Mary had experienced. She, in common with the rest of Miss Simmonds' young ladies, was almost jealous of the fame that Mary had obtained; to herself, such miserable notoriety.

"Nay! there's no use shunning talking it over. Why! it was in the *Guardian*,—and the *Courier*,—and

some one told Jane Hodson it was even copied into a London paper. You've set up heroine on your own account, Mary Barton. How did you like standing witness? Ar'n't them lawyers impudent things? staring at one so. I'll be bound you wished you'd taken my offer, and borrowed my black watered scarf! Now didn't you, Mary? Speak truth!"

"To tell truth, I never thought about it, then, Sally. How could I?" asked she, reproachfully.

"Oh—I forgot. You were all for that stupid James Wilson. Well! if I've ever the luck to go witness on a trial, see if I don't pick up a better beau than the prisoner. I'll aim at a lawyer's clerk, but I'll not take less than a turnkey."

Cast down as Mary was, she could hardly keep from smiling at the idea, so wildly incongruous with the scene she had really undergone, of looking out for admirers during a trial for murder.

"I'd no thought to be looking out for beaux, I can assure you, Sally.—But don't let us talk any more about it, I can't bear to think on it. How is Miss Simmonds? and every-body?"

"Oh, very well; and by the way she gave me a bit of a message for you. You may come back to work if you'll behave yourself, she says. I told you she'd be glad to have you back, after all this piece of business, by way of tempting people to come to her shop. They'd come from Salford to have a peep at you, for six months at least."

"Don't talk so; I cannot come, I can never face

Miss Simmonds again. And even if I could," she stopped, and blushed.

"Ay! I know what you're thinking on. But that will not be this some time, as he's turned off from the foundry,—you'd better think twice afore refusing Miss Simmonds' offer."

"Turned off from the foundry! Jem?" cried Mary.

"To be sure! didn't you know it? Decent men were not going to work with a—no! I suppose I mustn't say it, seeing you went to such trouble to get up an *alibi;* not that I should think much the worse of a spirited young fellow for falling foul of a rival,—they always do at the theatre."

But Mary's thoughts were with Jem. How good he had been never to name his dismissal to her. How much he had to endure for her sake!

"Tell me all about it," she gasped out.

"Why, you see, they've always swords quite handy at them plays," began Sally, but Mary, with an impatient shake of her head, interrupted,

"About Jem,—about Jem, I want to know."

"Oh! I don't pretend to know more than is in every one's mouth: he's turned away from the foundry, because folks don't think you've cleared him outright of the murder; though perhaps the jury were loth to hang him. Old Mr. Carson is savage against judge, and jury, and lawyers and all, as I heard."

"I must go to him, I must go to him," repeated Mary, in a hurried manner.

"He'll tell you all I've said is true, and not a word of lie," replied Sally. "So I'll not give your answer to Miss Simmonds, but leave you to think twice about it. Good afternoon!"

Mary shut the door, and turned into the house.

Her father sat in the same attitude; the old unchanging attitude. Only his head was more bowed towards the ground.

She put on her bonnet to go to Ancoats; for see, and question, and comfort, and worship Jem, she must.

As she hung about her father for an instant before leaving him, he spoke—voluntarily spoke for the first time since her return; but his head was drooping so low she could not hear what he said, so she stooped down; and after a moment's pause, he repeated the words,

"Tell Jem Wilson to come here at eight o'clock to-night."

Could he have overheard her conversation with Sally Leadbitter? They had whispered low, she thought. Pondering on this, and many other things, she reached Ancoats.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Oh, had he lived,
Replied Rusilla, never penitence
Had equalled his! full well I know his heart,
Vehement in all things. He would on himself
Have wreaked such penance as had reached the height
Of fleshly suffering,—yea, which being told,
With its portentous rigour should have made
The memory of his fault, o'erpowered and lost
In shuddering pity and astonishment,
Fade like a feeble horror."

SOUTHEY'S 'RODERICK.'

As Mary was turning into the street where the Wilsons lived, Jem overtook her. He came upon her suddenly, and she started.

"You're going to see mother?" he asked, tenderly, placing her arm within his, and slackening his pace.

"Yes, and you too. Oh, Jem, is it true? tell me."

She felt rightly that he would guess the meaning of her only half expressed inquiry. He hesitated a moment before he answered her.

"Darling, it is; it's no use hiding it—if you mean that. I'm no longer to work at Duncombe's foundry. It's no time (to my mind) to have secrets from each

other, though I did not name it yesterday, thinking you might fret. I shall soon get work again, never fear."

"But why did they turn you off, when the jury had said you were innocent?"

"I was not just to say turned off, though I don't think I could have well staid on. A good number of the men managed to let out they should not like to work under me again; there were some few who knew me well enough to feel I could not have done it, but more were doubtful; and one spoke to young Mr. Duncombe, hinting at what they thought."

"Oh Jem! what a shame!" said Mary, with mournful indignation.

"Nay, darling! I'm not for blaming them. Poor fellows like them have nought to stand upon and be proud of but their character, and its fitting they should take care of that, and keep that free from soil and taint."

"But you,—what could they get but good from you? They might have known you by this time."

"So some do; the overlooker, I am sure, would know I am innocent. Indeed, he said as much to-day; and he said he had had some talk with old Mr. Duncombe, and they thought it might be better if I left Manchester for a bit; they'd recommend me to some other place."

But Mary could only shake her head in a mournful way, and repeat her words,

"They might have known thee better, Jem."

Jem pressed the little hand he held between his

own work-hardened ones. After a minute or two, he asked,

"Mary, art thou much bound to Manchester? Would it grieve thee sore to quit the old smoke-jack?"

"With thee?" she asked, in a quiet, glancing way.

"Ay, lass! Trust me, I'll ne'er ask thee to leave Manchester while I'm in it. Because I've heard fine things of Canada; and our overlooker has a cousin in the foundry line there.—Thou knowest where Canada is, Mary?"

"Not rightly—not now, at any rate;—but with thee, Jem," her voice sunk to a soft, low whisper, "anywhere—"

What was the use of a geographical description?

"But father!" said Mary, suddenly breaking that delicious silence with the one sharp discord in her present life.

She looked up at her lover's grave face; and then the message her father had sent flashed across her memory.

"Oh, Jem, did I tell you?—Father sent word he wished to speak with you. I was to bid you come to him at eight to-night. What can he want, Jem?"

"I cannot tell," replied he. "At any rate I'll go. It's no use troubling ourselves to guess," he continued, after a pause of a few minutes, during which they slowly and silently paced up and down the by-street, into which he had led her when their conversation be-

gan. "Come and see mother, and then I'll take thee home, Mary. Thou wert all in a tremble when first I came up with thee, thou'rt not fit to be trusted home by thyself," said he, with fond exaggeration of her helplessness.

Yet a little more lover's loitering; a few more words, in themselves nothing—to you nothing, but to those two what tender passionate language can I use to express the feelings which thrilled through that young man and maiden, as they listened to the syllables made dear and lovely through life by that hour's low-whispered talk.

It struck the half hour past seven.

"Come and speak to mother ; she knows you're to be her daughter, Mary, darling."

So they went in. Jane Wilson was rather chafed at her son's delay in returning home, for as yet he had managed to keep her in ignorance of his dismissal from the foundry : and it was her way to prepare some little pleasure, some little comfort for those she loved ; and if they, unwittingly, did not appear at the proper time to enjoy her preparation, she worked herself up into a state of fretfulness which found vent in upbraidings as soon as ever the objects of her care appeared, thereby marring the peace which should ever be the atmosphere of a home, however humble ; and causing a feeling almost amounting to loathing to arise at the sight of the "stalled ox," which, though an effect and proof of careful love, has been the cause of so much disturbance.

Mrs. Wilson had first sighed, and then grumbled to herself, over the increasing toughness of the potatoe-cakes she had made for her son's tea.

The door opened, and he came in; his face brightening into proud smiles, Mary Barton hanging on his arm, blushing and dimpling, with eye-lids veiling the happy light of her eyes,—there was around the young couple a radiant atmosphere—a glory of happiness.

Could his mother mar it? Could she break into it with her Martha-like cares? Only for one moment did she remember her sense of injury,—her wasted trouble,—and then, her whole woman's heart heaving with motherly love, and sympathy, she opened her arms, and received Mary into them, as, shedding tears of agitated joy, she murmured in her ear,

"Bless thee, Mary, bless thee! Only make him happy, and God bless thee for ever!"

It took some of Jem's self-command to separate those whom he so much loved, and who were beginning, for his sake, to love one another so dearly. But the time for his meeting John Barton drew on: and it was a long way to his house.

As they walked briskly thither, they hardly spoke; though many thoughts were in their minds.

The sun had not long set, but the first faint shade of twilight was over all; and when they opened the door, Jem could hardly perceive the objects within, by the waning light of day, and the flickering fire-blaze.

But Mary saw all at a glance!

Her eye, accustomed to what was usual in the aspect of the room, saw instantly what was unusual,—saw, and understood it all.

Her father was standing behind his habitual chair, holding by the back of it as if for support. And opposite to him there stood Mr. Carson; the dark out-line of his stern figure looming large against the light of the fire in that little room.

Behind her father sat Job Legh, his head in his hands, and resting his elbows on the little family table,—listening evidently; but as evidently deeply affected by what he heard.

There seemed to be some pause in the conversation. Mary and Jem stood at the half-open door, not daring to stir; hardly to breathe.

"And have I heard you aright?" began Mr. Carson, with his deep quivering voice. "Man! have I heard you aright? Was it you, then, that killed my boy? my only son?"—(he said these last few words almost as if appealing for pity, and then he changed his tone to one more vehement and fierce). "Don't dare to think that I shall be merciful, and spare you, because you have come forward to accuse yourself. I tell you I will not spare you the least pang the law can inflict,—you, who did not show pity on my boy, shall have none from me."

"I did not ask for any," said John Barton, in a low voice.

"Ask, or not ask, what care I? You shall be hanged—hanged—man!" said he, advancing his face, and

repeating the word with slow grinding emphasis, as if to infuse some of the bitterness of his soul into it.

John Barton gasped; but not with fear. It was only that he felt it terrible to have inspired such hatred, as was concentrated into every word, every gesture of Mr. Carson's.

"As for being hanged, sir, I know it's all right and proper. I dare say it's bad enough; but I tell you what, sir," speaking with an out-burst, "if you'd hanged me the day after I'd done the deed, I would have gone down on my knees, and blessed you. Death! Lord, what is it to Life? To such a Life as I've been leading this fortnight past. Life at best is no great thing; but such a Life as I have dragged through since that night," he shuddered at the thought. "Why, sir, I've been on the point of killing myself this many a time to get away from my own thoughts. I didn't! and I'll tell you why. I didn't know but that I should be more haunted than ever with the recollection of my sin. Oh! God above only can tell the agony with which I've repented me of it, and part perhaps because I feared He would think I were impatient of the misery He sent as punishment—far, far worse misery than any hanging, sir;" he ceased from excess of emotion.

Then he began again.

"Sin' that day (it may be very wicked, sir, but it's the truth) I've kept thinking and thinking if I were but in that world where they say God is, He would,

may be, teach me right from wrong, even if it were with many stripes. I've been sore puzzled here. I would go through Hell-fire if I could but get free from sin at last, it's such an awful thing. As for hanging, that's just nought at all."

His exhaustion compelled him to sit down. Mary rushed to him. It seemed as if till then he had been unaware of her presence.

"Ay, ay, wench!" said he feebly, "is it thee? Where's Jem Wilson?"

Jem came forward. John Barton spoke again, with many a break, and gasping pause,

"Lad! thou hast borne a deal for me. It's the meanest thing I ever did to leave thee to bear the brunt. Thou, who wert as innocent of any knowledge of it as the babe unborn. I'll not bless thee for it. Blessing from such as me would not bring thee any good. Thou'lt love Mary, though she is my child."

He ceased, and there was a pause of a few seconds.

Then Mr. Carson turned to go. When his hand was on the latch of the door, he hesitated for an instant.

"You can have no doubt for what purpose I go. Straight to the police-office, to send men to take care of you, wretched man, and your accomplice. To-morrow morning your tale shall be repeated to those who can commit you to goal, and before long you shall have the opportunity of trying how desirable hanging is."

"Oh, sir!" said Mary, springing forward, and catching hold of Mr. Carson's arm, "my father is dying. Look at him, sir. If you want Death for Death, you have it. Don't take him away from me these last hours. He must go alone through Death, but let me be with him as long as I can. Oh, sir! if you have any mercy in you, leave him here to die."

John himself stood up, stiff and rigid, and replied,

"Mary, wench! I owe him summut. I will go die, where, and as he wishes me. Thou hast said true, I am standing side by side with Death; and it matters little where I spend the bit of time left of Life. That time I must pass in wrestling with my soul for a character to take into the other world. I'll go where you see fit, sir. He's innocent," faintly indicating Jem, as he fell back in his chair.

"Never fear! They cannot touch him," said Job Legh, in a low voice.

But as Mr. Carson was on the point of leaving the house with no sign of relenting about him, he was again stopped by John Barton, who had risen once more from his chair, and stood supporting himself on Jem, while he spoke.

"Sir, one word! My hairs are gray with suffering, and yours with years—"

"And have I had no suffering?" asked Mr. Carson, as if appealing for sympathy, even to the murderer of his child.

And the murderer of his child answered to the appeal, and groaned in spirit over the anguish he had caused.

"Have I had no inward suffering to blanch these hairs? Have not I toiled and struggled even to these years with hopes in my heart that all centered in my boy? I did not speak of them, but were they not there? I seemed hard and cold; and so I might be to others, but not to him! who shall ever imagine the love I bore to him? Even he never dreamed how my heart leapt up at the sound of his footstep, and how precious he was to his poor old father.—And he is gone—killed—out of the hearing of all loving words—out of my sight for ever. He was my sunshine, and now it is night! Oh, my God! comfort me, comfort me!" cried the old man, aloud.

The eyes of John Barton grew dim with tears. Rich and poor, masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart; for was not this the very anguish he had felt for little Tom, in years so long gone by that they seemed like another life!

The mourner before him was no longer the employer; a being of another race, eternally placed in antagonistic attitude; going through the world glittering like gold, with a stony heart within, which knew no sorrow but through the accidents of Trade; no longer the enemy, the oppressor, but a very poor, and desolate old man.

The sympathy for suffering, formerly so prevalent a feeling with him, again filled John Barton's heart, and

almost impelled him to speak (as best he could) some earnest, tender words to the stern man, shaking in his agony.

But who was he, that he should utter sympathy, or consolation? The cause of all this woe.

Oh blasting thought! Oh miserable remembrance! He had forfeited all right to bind up his brother's wounds.

Stunned by the thought, he sank upon the seat, almost crushed with the knowledge of the consequences of his own action; for he had no more imagined to himself the blighted home, and the miserable parents, than does the soldier, who discharges his musket, picture to himself the desolation of the wife, and the pitiful cries of the helpless little ones, who are in an instant to be made widowed, and fatherless.

To intimidate a class of men, known only to those below them as desirous to obtain the greatest quantity of work for the lowest wages,—at most to remove an overbearing partner from an obnoxious firm, who stood in the way of those who struggled as well as they were able to obtain their rights,—this was the light in which John Barton had viewed his deed; and even so viewing it, after the excitement had passed away, the Avenger, the sure Avenger, had found him out.

But now he knew that he had killed a man, and a brother,—now he knew that no good thing could come out of this evil, even to the sufferers whose cause he had so blindly espoused.

He lay across the table, broken-hearted. Every fresh quivering sob of Mr. Carson's stabbed him to his soul.

He felt execrated by all; and as if he could never lay bare the perverted reasonings which had made the performance of undoubted sin appear a duty. The longing to plead some faint excuse grew stronger and stronger. He feebly raised his head, and looking at Job Legh, he whispered out,

"I did not know what I was doing, Job Legh, God knows I didn't! Oh, sir!" said he wildly, almost throwing himself at Mr. Carson's feet, "say you forgive me the anguish I now see I have caused you. I care not for pain, or death, you know I don't; but oh, man! forgive me the trespass I have done!"

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us," said Job, solemnly and low, as if in prayer; as if the words were suggested by those John Barton had used.

Mr. Carson took his hands away from his face. I would rather see death than the ghastly gloom which darkened that countenance.

"Let my trespasses be unforgiven, so that I may have vengeance for my son's murder."

There are blasphemous actions as well as blasphemous words: all unloving, cruel deeds are acted blasphemy.

Mr. Carson left the house. And John Barton lay on the ground as one dead.

They lifted him up, and (almost hoping that that deep trance might be to him the end of all earthly things) they bore him to his bed.

For a time they listened with divided attention to his faint breathings ; for in each hasty hurried step that echoed in the street outside, they thought they heard the approach of the officers of justice.

When Mr. Carson left the house he was dizzy with agitation ; the hot blood went careering through his frame. He could not see the deep blue of the night-heavens for the fierce pulses which throbbed in his head. And partly to steady and calm himself, he leaned against a railing, and looked up into those calm majestic depths with all their thousand stars.

And by-and-by his own voice returned upon him, as if the last words he had spoken were being uttered through all that infinite space ; but in their echoes there was a tone of unutterable sorrow.

" Let my trespasses be unforgiven, so that I may have vengeance for my son's murder."

He tried to shake off the spiritual impression made by this imagination. He was feverish and ill,—and no wonder.

So he turned to go homewards; not, as he had threatened, to the police-office. After all (he told himself), that would do in the morning. No fear of the man's escaping, unless he escaped to the Grave.

So he tried to banish the phantom voices and shapes which came unbidden to his brain, and to recall his

balance of mind by walking calmly and slowly, and noticing every thing which struck his senses.

It was a warm soft evening in spring, and there were many persons in the streets. Among others, a nurse with a little girl in her charge, conveying her home from some children's gaiety; a dance most likely, for the lovely little creature was daintily decked out in soft, snowy muslin; and her fairy feet tripped along by her nurse's side, as if to the measure of some tune she had lately kept time to.

Suddenly up behind her there came a rough, rude errand-boy, nine or ten years of age; a giant he looked by the fairy-child, as she fluttered along. I don't know how it was, but in some awkward way he knocked the poor little girl down upon the hard pavement as he brushed rudely past, not much caring whom he hurt, so that he got along.

The child arose sobbing with pain; and not without cause, for blood was dropping down from the face, but a minute before so fair and bright—dropping down on the pretty frock, making these scarlet marks so terrible to little children.

The nurse, a powerful woman, had seized the boy, just as Mr. Carson (who had seen the whole transaction) came up.

"You naughty little rascal! I'll give you to a policeman, that I will! Do you see how you've hurt the little girl? Do you?" accompanying every sentence with a violent jerk of passionate anger.

The lad looked hard, and defying ; but withal terrifiedat the threat of the policeman, those ogres of our streets to all unlucky urchins. The nurse saw it, and began to drag him along, with a view of making what she called " a wholesome impression."

His terror increased, and with it his irritation ; when the little sweet face, choking away its sobs, pulled down nurse's head, and said,

" Please, dear nurse, I'm not much hurt; it was very silly to cry, you know. *He did not know what he was doing*, did you, little boy ? Nurse won't call a policeman, so don't be frightened." And she put up her little mouth to be kissed by her injurer, just as she had been taught to do at home to " make peace."

" That lad will mind, and be more gentle for the time to come, I'll be bound, thanks to that little lady," said a passer-by, half to himself, and half to Mr. Carson, whom he had observed to notice the scene.

The latter took no apparent heed of the remark, but passed on. But the child's pleading reminded him of the low, broken voice he had so lately heard, penitently and humbly urging the same extenuation of his great guilt.

" I did not know what I was doing."

He had some association with those words ; he had heard, or read of that plea somewhere before. Where was it ?

Could it be— ?

He would look when he got home. So when he entered his house he went straight and silently up-stairs

to his library, and took down the great large handsome Bible, all grand and golden, with its leaves adhering together from the bookbinder's press, so little had it been used.

On the first page (which fell open to Mr. Carson's view) were written the names of his children, and his own.

"Henry John, son of the above John, and Elizabeth Carson. Born, Sept. 29th, 1815."

To make the entry complete, his death should now be added. But the page became hidden by the gathering mist of tears.

Thought upon thought, and recollection upon recollection came crowding in, from the remembrance of the proud day when he had purchased the costly book, in order to write down the birth of the little babe of a day old.

He laid his head down on the open page, and let the tears fall slowly on the spotless leaves.

His son's murderer was discovered; had confessed his guilt; and yet (strange to say) he could not hate him with the vehemence of hatred he had felt, when he had imagined him a young man, full of lusty life, defying all laws, human and divine. In spite of his desire to retain the revengeful feeling he considered as a duty to his dead son, something of pity would steal in for the poor, wasted skeleton of a man, the smitten creature, who had told him of his sin, and implored his pardon that night.

In the days of his childhood and youth, Mr. Carson

had been accustomed to poverty : but it was honest decent poverty ; not the grinding squalid misery he had remarked in every part of John Barton's house, and which contrasted strangely with the pompous sumptuousness of the room in which he now sate. Unaccustomed wonder filled his mind at the reflection of the different lots of the brethren of mankind.

Then he roused himself from his reverie, and turned to the object of his search—the Gospel, where he half expected to find the tender pleading. "They know not what they do."

It was mirk midnight by this time, and the house was still and quiet. There was nothing to interrupt the old man in his unwonted study.

Years ago, the Gospel had been his task-book in learning to read. So many years ago, that he had become familiar with the events before he could comprehend the Spirit that made the Life.

He fell to the narrative now, afresh, with all the interest of a little child. He began at the beginning, and read on almost greedily, understanding for the first time the full meaning of the story. He came to the end ; the awful End. And there were the haunting words of pleading.

He shut the book, and thought deeply.

All night long, the Arch-angel, combated with the Demon.

All night long, others watched by the bed of Death. John Barton had revived to fitful intelligence. He

spoke at times with even something of his former energy; and in the racy Lancashire dialect he had always used when speaking freely.

"You see I've so often been hankering after the right way; and it's a hard one for a poor man to find. At least it's been so to me. No one learned me, and no one telled me. When I was a little chap they taught me to read, and then they ne'er gave me no books; only I heard say the Bible was a good book. So when I grew thoughtful, and puzzled, I took to it. But you'd never believe black was black, or night was night, when you saw all about you acting as if black was white, and night was day. It's not much I can say for myself in t'other world, God forgive me: but I can say this, I would fain have gone after the Bible rules if I'd seen folk credit it; they all spoke up for it, and went and did clean contrary. In those days I would ha' gone about with my Bible, like a little child, my finger in th' place, and asking the meaning of this or that text, and no one told me. Then I took out two or three texts as clear as glass, and I tried to do what they bid me do. But I don't know how it was; masters and men, all alike cared no more for minding those texts, than I did for th' Lord Mayor of London; so I grew to think it must be a sham put upon poor ignorant folk, women, and such-like.

"It was not long I tried to live Gospel-wise, but it was liker heaven than any other bit of earth has been.

I'd old Alice to strengthen me; but every one else said, 'Stand up for thy rights, or thou'lt never get 'em;' and wife, and children never spoke, but their helplessness cried aloud, and I was driven to do as others did, —and then Tom died. You know all about that—I'm getting scant o' breath, and blind-like."

Then again he spoke, after some minutes of hushed silence.

"All along it came natural to love folk, though now I am what I am. I think one time I could e'en have loved the masters if they'd ha letten me; that was in my Gospel-days, afore my child died o' hunger. I was tore in two often-times, between my sorrow for poor suffering folk, and my trying to love them as caused their sufferings (to my mind).

"At last I gave it up in despair, trying to make folks' actions square wi' th' Bible; and I thought I'd no longer labour at following th' Bible mysel. I've said all this afore, may be. But from that time I've dropped down, down,—down."

After that he only spoke in broken sentences.

"I did not think he'd been such an old man,—Oh! that he had but forgiven me,"—and then came earnest, passionate, broken words of prayer.

Job Legh had gone home like one struck down with the unexpected shock. Mary and Jem together waited the approach of death; but as the final struggle drew on, and morning dawned, Jem suggested some alleviation to the gasping breath, to purchase which he left

the house in search of a druggist's shop, which should be open at that early hour.

During his absence, Barton grew worse; he had fallen across the bed, and his breathing seemed almost stopped; in vain did Mary strive to raise him, her sorrow and exhaustion had rendered her too weak.

So, on hearing some one enter the house-place below, she cried out for Jem to come to her assistance.

A step, which was not Jem's, came up the stairs.

Mr. Carson stood in the door-way. In one instant he comprehended the case.

He raised up the powerless frame; and the departing soul looked out of the eyes with gratitude. He held the dying man propped in his arms. John Barton folded his hands as if in prayer.

"Pray for us," said Mary, sinking on her knees, and forgetting in that solemn hour all that had divided her father and Mr. Carson.

No other words could suggest themselves than some of those he had read only a few hours before.

"God be merciful to us sinners.—Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us."

And when the words were said, John Barton lay a corpse in Mr. Carson's arms.

So ended the tragedy of a poor man's life.

Mary knew nothing more for many minutes. When she recovered consciousness, she found herself supported

by Jem on the "settle" in the house-place. Job and Mr. Carson were there, talking together lowly and solemnly. Then Mr. Carson bade farewell and left the house; and Job said aloud, but as if speaking to himself,

"God has heard that man's prayer. He has comforted him."

CHAPTER XIX.

"The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress."
BYRON.

ALTHOUGH Mary had hardly been conscious of her thoughts, and it had been more like a secret instinct informing her soul, than the result of any process of reasoning, she had felt for some time (ever since her return from Liverpool, in fact), that for her father there was but one thing to be desired and anticipated, and that was death!

She had seen that Conscience had given the mortal wound to his earthly frame; she did not dare to question of the infinite mercy of God, what the Future Life would be to him.

Though at first desolate and stunned by the blow which had fallen on herself, she was resigned and submissive as soon as she recovered strength enough to ponder and consider a little; and you may be sure that no tenderness or love was wanting on Jem's part,

and no consideration and sympathy on that of Job and Margaret, to soothe and comfort the girl who now stood alone in the world as far as blood-relations were concerned.

She did not ask or care to know what arrangements they were making in whispered tones with regard to the funeral. She put herself into their hands with the trust of a little child ; glad to be undisturbed in the reveries and remembrances which filled her eyes with tears, and caused them to fall quietly down her pale cheeks.

It was the longest day she had ever known in her life; every charge and every occupation was taken away from her: but perhaps the length of quiet time thus afforded was really good, although its duration weighed upon her; for by this means she contemplated her situation in every light, and fully understood that the morning's event had left her an orphan ; and thus she was spared the pangs caused to us by the occurrence of death in the evening, just before we should naturally, in the usual course of events, lie down to slumber. For in such case, worn out by anxiety, and it may be by much watching, our very excess of grief rocks itself to sleep, before we have had time to realise its cause ; and we waken, with a start of agony like a fresh stab, to the consciousness of the one awful vacancy, which shall never, while the world endures, be filled again.

The day brought its burden of duty to Mrs. Wilson. She felt bound by regard, as well as by etiquette, to go and see her future daughter-in-law.

And by an old association of ideas (perhaps, of death with church-yards, and churches with Sunday), she thought it necessary to put on her best, and latterly unused clothes, the airing of which on a little clothes-horse before the fire seemed to give her a not unpleasing occupation.

When Jem returned home late in the evening succeeding John Barton's death, weary and oppressed with the occurrences and excitements of the day, he found his mother busy about her mourning, and much inclined to talk. Although he longed for quiet, he could not avoid sitting down and answering her questions.

"Well, Jem! he's gone at last, is he?"

"Yes. How did you hear, mother?"

"Oh, Job came over here and telled me, on his way to the undertaker's. Did he make a fine end?"

It struck Jem that she had not heard of the confession which had been made by John Barton on his death-bed; he remembered Job Legh's discretion, and he determined that if it could be avoided his mother should never hear of it. Many of the difficulties to be anticipated in preserving the secret would be obviated, if he could induce his mother to fall into the plan he had named to Mary of emigrating to Canada. The reasons which rendered this secrecy desirable related to the domestic happiness he hoped for. With his mother's irritable temper he could hardly expect that all allusion to the crime of John Barton would be for ever restrained from passing her lips, and he knew the deep trial such references would be to Mary. Ac-

cordingly he resolved as soon as possible in the morning to go to Job, and beseech his silence ; he trusted that secrecy in that quarter, even if the knowledge had been extended to Margaret, might be easily secured.

But what would be Mr. Carson's course ? Were there any means by which he might be persuaded to spare John Barton's memory ?

He was roused up from this train of thought by his mother's more irritated tone of voice.

"Jem!" she was saying, "thou might'st just as well never be at a death-bed again, if thou cannot bring off more news about it ; here have I been by mysel all day (except when oud Job came in), but thinks I, when Jem comes he'll be sure to be good company, seeing he was in the house at the very time of the death; and here thou art, without a word to throw at a dog, much less thy mother : it's no use thy going to a death-bed if thou cannot carry away any of the sayings!"

"He did not make any, mother," replied Jem.

"Well to be sure! So fond as he used to be of holding forth, to miss such a fine opportunity that will never come again! Did he die easy ?"

"He was very restless all night long," said Jem, reluctantly returning to the thoughts of that time.

"And in course thou plucked the pillow away ? Thou didst not! Well! with thy bringing up, and thy learning, thou might'st have known that were the only help in such a case. There were pigeons' feathers in the pillow, depend on't. To think of two grown-up

folk like you and Mary, not knowing death could never come easy to a person lying on a pillow with pigeons' feathers in!"

Jem was glad to escape from all this talking to the solitude and quiet of his own room, where he could lie and think uninterruptedly of what had happened and remained to be done.

The first thing was to seek an interview with Mr. Duncombe, his former master. Accordingly, early the next morning Jem set off on his walk to the works, where for so many years his days had been spent; where for so long a time his thoughts had been thought, his hopes and fears experienced. It was not a cheering feeling to remember that henceforward he was to be severed from all these familiar places; nor were his spirits enlivened by the evident feelings of the majority of those who had been his fellow-workmen. As he stood in the entrance to the foundry, awaiting Mr. Duncombe's leisure, many of those employed in the works passed him on their return from breakfast; and with one or two exceptions, without any acknowledgment of former acquaintance beyond a distant nod at the utmost.

"It is hard," said Jem, to himself, with a bitter and indignant feeling rising in his throat, "that let a man's life have been what it may, folk are so ready to credit the first word against him. I could live it down if I stayed in England; but then what would not Mary have to bear? Sooner or later the truth would out; and then she would be a show to folk for many a day

as John Barton's daughter. Well! God does not judge as hardly as man, that's one comfort for all of us!"

Mr. Duncombe did not believe in Jem's guilt, in spite of the silence in which he again this day heard the imputation of it; but he agreed that under the circumstances it was better he should leave the country.

"We have been written to by government, as I think I told you before, to recommend an intelligent man, well acquainted with mechanics, as instrument-maker to the Agricultural College they are establishing at Toronto in Canada. It is a comfortable appointment, —house,—land,—and a good per-centage on the instruments made. I will show you the particulars if I can lay my hand on the letter, which I believe I must have left at home."

"Thank you, sir. No need for seeing the letter to say I'll accept it. I must leave Manchester; and I'd as lief quit England at once when I'm about it."

"Of course government give you your passage; indeed I believe an allowance would be made for a family if you had one; but you are not a married man, I believe?"

"No, sir, but—" Jem hung back from a confession with the awkwardness of a girl.

"But—" said Mr. Duncombe, smiling, "you would like to be a married man before you go, I suppose; eh, Wilson?"

"If you please, sir. And there's my mother too.

I hope she'll go with us. But I can pay her passage ; no need to trouble government."

"Nay, nay! I'll write to-day and recommend you. And say that you have a family of two. They'll never ask if the family goes upwards or downwards. I shall see you again before you sail, I hope, Wilson ; though I believe they'll not allow you long to wait. Come to my house next time ; you'll find it pleasanter, I dare-say. These men are so wrong-headed. Keep up your heart!"

Jem felt that it was a relief to have this point settled; and that he need no longer weigh reasons for and against his emigration.

And with his path growing clearer and clearer before him the longer he contemplated it, he went to see Mary, and if he judged it fit, to tell her what he had decided upon. Margaret was sitting with her.

"Grandfather wants to see you!" said she, to Jem, on his entrance.

"And I want to see him," replied Jem, suddenly remembering his last night's determination to enjoin secrecy on Job Legh.

So he hardly stayed to kiss poor Mary's sweet woe-begone face, but tore himself away from his darling to go to the old man who awaited him impatiently.

"I've getten a note from Mr. Carson," exclaimed Job, the moment he saw Jem ; "and man-alive, he wants to see thee and me! For sure, there's no more

mischief up, is there ?" said he, looking at Jem with an expression of wonder. But if any suspicion mingled for an instant with the thoughts that crossed Job's mind, it was immediately dispelled by Jem's honest, fearless, open countenance.

"I can't guess what he's wanting, poor old chap!" answered he. "May be there's some point he's not yet satisfied on ; may be—but it's no use guessing ; let's be off."

"It wouldn't be better for thee to be scarce a bit, would it, and leave me to go and find out what's up ? He has, perhaps, getten some crotchet into his head thou'rt an accomplice, and is laying a trap for thee."

"I'm not afeared!" said Jem ; "I've done nought wrong, and know nought wrong, about yon poor dead lad ; though I'll own I had evil thoughts once on a time. Folk can't mistake long if once they'll search into the truth. I'll go and give the old gentleman all the satisfaction in my power, now it can injure no one. I'd my own reasons for wanting to see him besides, and it all falls in right enough for me."

Job was a little re-assured by Jem's boldness ; but still if the truth must be told, he wished the young man would follow his advice, and leave him to sound Mr. Carson's intentions.

Meanwhile Jane Wilson had donned her Sunday suit of black, and set off on her errand of condolence. She felt nervous and uneasy at the idea of the moral sayings and texts which she fancied were expected

from visitors on occasions like the present; and prepared many a good set speech as she walked towards the house of mourning.

As she gently opened the door, Mary, sitting idly by the fire, caught a glimpse of her,—of Jem's mother,—of the early friend of her dead parents,—of the kind minister to many a little want in days of childhood,—and rose and came and fell about her neck, with many a sob and moan, saying,

"Oh, he's gone—he's dead—all gone—all dead, and I am left alone!"

"Poor wench! poor, poor wench!" said Jane Wilson, tenderly kissing her. "Thou'rt not alone, so donnot take on so. I'll say nought of Him who's above, for thou know'st He is ever the orphan's friend; but think on Jem! nay, Mary, dear, think on me! I'm but a frabbit woman at times, but I've a heart within me through all my temper, and thou shalt be as a daughter henceforward,—as mine own ewe-lamb. Jem shall not love thee better in his way, than I will in mine; and thou'lt bear with my turns, Mary, knowing that in my soul God sees the love that shall ever be thine, if thou'lt take me for thy mother, and speak no more of being alone."

Mrs. Wilson was weeping herself long before she had ended this speech, which was so different to all she had planned to say, and from all the formal piety she had laid in store for the visit; for this was heart's-piety, and needed no garnish of texts to make it true religion, pure and undefiled.

They sat together on the same chair, their arms encircling each other; they wept for the same dead; they had the same hope, and trust, and overflowing love in the living.

From that time forward, hardly a passing cloud dimmed the happy confidence of their intercourse; even by Jem would his mother's temper sooner be irritated than by Mary; before the latter she repressed her occasional nervous ill-humour, till the habit of indulging it was perceptibly decreased.

Years afterwards in conversation with Jem, he was startled by a chance expression which dropped from his mother's lips; it implied a knowledge of John Barton's crime. It was many a long day since they had seen any Manchester people who could have revealed the secret (if indeed it was known in Manchester, against which Jem had guarded in every possible way). And he was led to inquire first as to the extent, and then as to the source of her knowledge. It was Mary herself who had told all.

For on the morning to which this chapter principally relates, as Mary sat weeping, and as Mrs. Wilson comforted her by every tenderest word and caress, she revealed to the dismayed, and astonished Jane, the sting of her deep sorrow; the crime which stained her dead father's memory.

She was quite unconscious that Jem had kept it secret from his mother; she had imagined it bruited abroad as the suspicion against her lover had been; so word after word (dropped from her lips in the sup-

position that Mrs. Wilson knew all) had told the tale, and revealed the cause of her deep anguish ; deeper than is ever caused by Death alone.

On large occasions like the present, Mrs. Wilson's innate generosity came out. Her weak and ailing frame imparted its irritation to her conduct in small things, and daily trifles ; but she had deep and noble sympathy with great sorrows, and even at the time that Mary spoke she allowed no expression of surprise or horror to escape her lips. She gave way to no curiosity as to the untold details ; she was as secret and trustworthy as her son himself ; and if in years to come her anger was occasionally excited against Mary, and she, on rare occasions, yielded to ill-temper against her daughter-in-law, she would upbraid her for extravagance, or stinginess, or over-dressing, or under-dressing, or too much mirth, or too much gloom, but never, never in her most uncontrolled moments, did she allude to any one of the circumstances relating to Mary's flirtation with Harry Carson, or his murderer ; and always when she spoke of John Barton, named him with the respect due to his conduct before the last, miserable, guilty month of his life.

Therefore it came like a blow to Jem when after years had passed away, he gathered his mother's knowledge of the whole affair. From the day when he learnt (not without remorse) what hidden depths of self-restraint she had in her soul, his manner to her, always tender and respectful, became reverential ; and it was more than ever a loving strife between him

and Mary, which should most contribute towards the happiness of the declining years of their mother.

But I am speaking of the events which have occurred only lately, while I have yet many things to tell you that happened six or seven years ago.

CHAPTER XX.

"The rich man dines, while the poor man pines,
And eats his heart away;
'They teach us lies,' he sternly cries,
'Would *brothers* do as they?'"

'THE DREAM.'

MR. CARSON stood at one of the breathing-places of life. The object of the toils, the fears, and the wishes of his past years, was suddenly hidden from his sight,—vanished into the deep mystery which circumscribes existence. Nay, even the vengeance which he had proposed to himself as an aim for exertion, had been taken away from before his eyes, as by the hand of God.

Events like these would have startled the most thoughtless into reflection, much more such a man as Mr. Carson, whose mind, if not enlarged, was energetic; indeed, whose very energy, having been hitherto the cause of the employment of his powers in only one direction, had prevented him from becoming largely and philosophically comprehensive in his views.

But now the foundations of his past life were razed to the ground, and the place they had once occupied was sown with salt, to be for ever rebuilt no more. It was like the change from this Life to that other hidden one; when so many of the motives which have actuated all our earthly existence, will have become more fleeting than the shadows of a dream. With a wrench of his soul from the past, so much of which was as nothing, and worse than nothing to him now, Mr. Carson took some hours, after he had witnessed the death of his son's murderer, to consider his situation.

But suddenly, while he was deliberating, and searching for motives which should be effective to compel him to exertion and action once more; while he contemplated the desire after riches, social distinction, a name among the merchant-princes amidst whom he moved, and saw these false substances fade away into the shadows they truly are, and one by one disappear into the grave of his son,—suddenly, I say, the thought arose within him that more yet remained to be learned about the circumstances and feelings which had prompted John Barton's crime; and when once this mournful curiosity was excited, it seemed to gather strength in every moment that its gratification was delayed. Accordingly he sent a message to summon Job Legh and Jem Wilson, from whom he promised himself some elucidation of what was as yet unexplained; while he himself set forth to call on Mr. Bridgenorth, whom he knew to have been Jem's attorney, with a

glimmering suspicion intruding on his mind, which he strove to repel, that Jem might have had some share in his son's death.

He had returned before his summoned visitors arrived; and had time enough to recur to the evening on which John Barton had made his confession. He remembered with mortification how he had forgotten his proud reserve, and his habitual concealment of his feelings, and had laid bare his agony of grief in the presence of these two men who were coming to see him by his desire; and he entrenched himself behind stiff barriers of self-control, through which he hoped no appearance of emotion would force its way in the conversation he anticipated.

Nevertheless, when the servant announced that two men were there by appointment to speak to him, and he had desired that they might be shown into the library where he sat, any watcher might have perceived by the trembling hands, and shaking head, not only how much he was aged by the occurrences of the last few weeks, but also how much he was agitated at the thought of the impending interview.

But he so far succeeded in commanding himself at first, as to appear to Jem Wilson and Job Legh one of the hardest and most haughty men they had ever spoken to, and to forfeit all the interest which he had previously excited in their minds by his unreserved display of deep and genuine feeling.

When he had desired them to be seated, he shaded his face with his hand for an instant before speaking.

"I have been calling on Mr. Bridgenorth this morning," said he, at last; "as I expected, he can give me but little satisfaction on some points respecting the occurrence on the 18th of last month, which I desire to have cleared up. Perhaps you two can tell me what I want to know. As intimate friends of Barton's you probably know, or can conjecture a good deal. Have no scruple as to speaking the truth. What you say in this room shall never be named again by me. Besides, you are aware that the law allows no one to be tried twice for the same offence."

He stopped for a minute, for the mere act of speaking was fatiguing to him after the excitement of the last few weeks.

Job Legh took the opportunity of speaking.

"I'm not going to be affronted either for myself or Jem at what you've just now been saying about the truth. You don't know us, and there's an end on't; only it's as well for folk to think others good and true until they're proved contrary. Ask what you like, sir, I'll answer for it we'll either tell truth, or hold our tongues."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Carson, slightly bowing his head. "What I wished to know was," referring to a slip of paper he held in his hand, and shaking so much he could hardly adjust his glasses to his eyes, "whether you, Wilson, can explain how Barton came possessed of your gun. I believe you refused this explanation to Mr. Bridgenorth."

"I did, sir! If I had said what I knew then, I saw

it would criminate Barton, and so I refused telling aught. To you, sir, now I will tell every thing and any thing; only it is but little. The gun was my father's before it was mine, and long ago he and John Barton had a fancy for shooting at the gallery; and they used always to take this gun, and brag that though it was old-fashioned it was sure."

Jem saw with self-upbraiding pain how Mr. Carson winced at these last words, but at each irrepressible and involuntary evidence of feeling, the hearts of the two men warmed towards him. Jem went on speaking.

"One day in the week—I think it was on the Wednesday,—yes, it was,—it was on St. Patrick's day, I met John just coming out of our house, as I were going to my dinner. Mother was out, and he'd found no one in. He said he'd come to borrow the old gun, and that he'd have made bold, and taken it, but it was not to be seen. Mother was afraid of it, so after father's death (for while he were alive, she seemed to think he could manage it) I had carried it to my own room. I went up and fetched it for John, who stood outside the door all the time."

"What did he say he wanted it for?" asked Mr. Carson, hastily.

"I don't think he spoke when I gave it him. At first he muttered something about the shooting-gallery, and I never doubted but that it were for practice there, as I knew he had done years before."

Mr. Carson had strung up his frame to an attitude of upright attention while Jem was speaking; now the

tension relaxed, and he sank back in his chair, weak and powerless.

He rose up again, however, as Jem went on, anxious to give every particular which could satisfy the bereaved father.

"I never knew for what he wanted the gun till I was taken up,—I do not know yet why he wanted it. No one would have had me get out of the scrape by implicating an old friend,—my father's old friend, and the father of the girl I loved. So I refused to tell Mr. Bridgenorth aught about it, and would not have named it now to any one but you."

Jem's face became very red at the allusion he made to Mary, but his honest, fearless eyes had met Mr. Carson's penetrating gaze unflinchingly, and had carried conviction of his innocence and truthfulness; Mr. Carson felt certain that he had heard all that Jem could tell. Accordingly he turned to Job Legh.

"You were in the room the whole time while Barton was speaking to me, I think?"

"Yes, sir," answered Job.

"You'll excuse my asking plain and direct questions; the information I am gaining is really a relief to my mind, I don't know how, but it is,—will you tell me if you had any idea of Barton's guilt in this matter before?"

"None whatever, so help me God!" said Job, solemnly. "To tell truth (and axing your forgiveness, Jem), I had never got quite shut of the notion, that Jem here had done it. At times I was as clear of his

innocence as I was of my own; and whenever I took to reasoning about it, I saw he could not have been the man that did it. Still I never thought of Barton."

"And yet by his confession he must have been absent at the time," said Mr. Carson, refering to his slip of paper.

"Ay, and for many a day after,—I can't rightly say how long. But still, you see, one's often blind to many a thing that lies right under one's nose, till it's pointed out. And till I heard what John Barton had to say yon night, I could not have seen what reason he had for doing it; while in the case of Jem, any one who looked at Mary Barton might have seen a cause for jealousy, clear enough."

"Then you believe that Barton had no knowledge of my son's unfortunate,—" he looked at Jem, "of his attentions to Mary Barton. This young man, Wilson, had heard of them, you see."

"The person who told me, said clearly she neither had, nor would tell Mary's father," interposed Jem. "I don't believe he'd ever heard of it; he weren't a man to keep still in such a matter, if he had."

"Besides," said Job, "the reason he gave on his death-bed, so to speak, was enough; 'specially to those who knew him."

"You mean his feelings regarding the treatment of the workmen by the masters; you think he acted from motives of revenge, in consequence of the part my son had taken in putting down the strike?"

"Well, sir," replied Job. "it's hard to say: John

Barton was not a man to take counsel with people ; nor did he make many words about his doings. So I can only judge from his way of thinking and talking in general, never having heard him breathe a syllable concerning this matter in particular. You see he were sadly put about to make great riches and great poverty square with Christ's Gospel"—Job paused, in order to try and express what was clear enough in his own mind, as to the effect produced on John Barton by the great and mocking contrasts presented by the varieties of human condition. Before he could find suitable words to explain his meaning, Mr. Carson spoke.

"You mean he was an Owenite ; all for equality, and community of goods, and that kind of absurdity."

"No, no! John Barton was no fool. No need to tell him that were all men equal to-night, some would get the start by rising an hour earlier to-morrow. Nor yet did he care for goods, nor wealth; no man less, so that he could get daily bread for him and his ; but what hurt him sore, and rankled in him as long as I knew him (and, sir, it rankles in many a poor man's heart far more than the want of any creature-comforts, and puts a sting into starvation itself), was that those who wore finer clothes, and eat better food, and had more money in their pockets, kept him at arm's length, and cared not whether his heart was sorry or glad; whether he lived or died,—whether he was bound for heaven or hell. It seemed hard to him that a heap of gold should part him and his brother so far asunder. For he was a loving man before he grew mad with seeing

such as he was slighted, as if Christ himself had not been poor. At one time, I've heard him say, he felt kindly towards every man, rich or poor, because he thought they were all men alike. But latterly he grew aggravated with the sorrows and suffering that he saw, and which he thought the masters might help if they would."

"That's the notion you've all of you got," said Mr. Carson. "Now, how in the world can we help it? We cannot regulate the demand for labour. No man or set of men can do it. It depends on events which God alone can control. When there is no market for our goods, we suffer just as much as you can do."

"Not as much, I'm sure, sir; though I'm not given to Political Economy, I know that much. I'm wanting in learning, I'm aware; but I can use my eyes. I never see the Masters getting thin and haggard for want of food; I hardly ever see them making much change in their way of living, though I don't doubt they've got to do it in bad times. But it's in things for show they cut short; while for such as me, it's in things for life we've to stint. For sure, sir, you'll own it's come to a hard pass when a man would give ought in the world for work to keep his children from starving, and can't get a bit, if he's ever so willing to labour. I'm not up to talking as John Barton would have done, but that's clear to me at any rate."

"My good man, just listen to me. Two men live in a solitude; one produces loaves of bread, the other

coats,—or what you will. Now would it not be hard if the bread-producer were forced to give bread for the coats, whether he wanted them or not, in order to furnish employment to the other : that is the simple form of the case ; you've only to multiply the numbers. There will come times of great changes in the occupation of thousands, when improvements in manufactures and machinery are made.—It's all nonsense talking,—it must be so!"

Job Legh pondered a few moments.

" It's true it was a sore time for the hand-loom weavers when power-looms came in : them new-fangled things make a man's life like a lottery ; and yet I'll never misdoubt that power-looms, and railways, and all such-like inventions, are the gifts of God. I have lived long enough, too, to see that it is part of His plan to send suffering to bring out a higher good; but surely it's also part of His plan that as much of the burden of the suffering as can be, should be lightened by those whom it is His pleasure to make happy, and content in their own circumstances. Of course it would take a deal more thought and wisdom than me, or any other man has, to settle out of hand how this should be done. But I'm clear about this, when God gives a blessing to be enjoyed, He gives it with a duty to be done ; and the duty of the happy is to help the suffering to bear their woe."

" Still, facts have proved and are daily proving how much better it is for every man to be indepen-

dent of help, and self-reliant," said Mr. Carson, thoughtfully.

"You can never work facts as you would fixed quantities, and say, given two facts, and the product is so and so. God has given men feelings and passions which cannot be worked into the problem, because they are for ever changing, and uncertain. God has also made some weak; not in any one way but in all. One is weak in body, another in mind, another in steadiness of purpose, a fourth can't tell right from wrong, and so on ; or if he can tell the right, he wants strength to hold by it. Now to my thinking, them that is strong in any of God's gifts is meant to help the weak,—be hanged to the facts! I ask your pardon sir : I can't rightly explain the meaning that is in me. I'm like a tap as won't run, but keeps letting it out drop by drop, so that you've no notion of the force of what's within."

Job looked and felt very sorrowful at the want of power in his words, while the feeling within him was so strong and clear.

"What you say is very true, no doubt," replied Mr. Carson ; "but how would you bring it to bear upon the masters' conduct,—on my particular case ?" added he, gravely.

"I'm not learned enough to argue. Thoughts come into my head that I'm sure are as true as Gospel, though may be they don't follow each other like the Q. E. D. of a Proposition. The masters has it on their own conscience,

—you have it on yours, sir, to answer for to God whether you've done, and are doing all in your power to lighten the evils, that seem always to hang on the trades by which you make your fortunes. It's no business of mine, thank God. John Barton took the question in hand, and his answer to it was NO! Then he grew bitter and angry, and mad ; and in his madness he did a great sin, and wrought a great woe ; and repented him with tears as of blood ; and will go through his penance humbly and meekly in t'other place, I'll be bound. I never seed such bitter repentance as his that last night."

There was a silence of many minutes. Mr. Carson had covered his face, and seemed utterly forgetful of their presence ; and yet they did not like to disturb him by rising to leave the room.

At last he said, without meeting their sympathetic eyes,

"Thank you both for coming,—and for speaking candidly to me. I fear, Legh, neither you nor I have convinced each other, as to the power, or want of power in the masters, to remedy the evils the men complain of."

"I'm loth to vex you, sir, just now ; but it was not the want of power I was talking on ; what we all feel sharpest is the want of inclination to try and help the evils which come like blights at times over the manufacturing places, while we see the masters can stop work, and not suffer. If we saw the masters try for our sakes to find a remedy,—even if they were long about

it,—even if they could find no help, and at the end of all could only say, 'Poor fellows, our hearts are sore for ye; we've done all we could, and can't find a cure,'—we'd bear up like men through bad times. No one knows till they've tried, what power of bearing lies in them, if once they believe that men are caring for their sorrows, and will help if they can. If fellow-creatures can give nought but tears, and brave words, we take our trials straight from God, and we know enough of His love to put ourselves blind into his hands. You say, our talk has done no good. I say it has. I see the view you take of things from the place where you stand. I can remember that, when the time comes for judging you, I sha'n't think any longer, does he act right on my views of a thing, but does he act right on his own. It has done me good in that way. I'm an old man, and may never see you again; but I'll pray for you, and think on you and your trials, both of your great wealth, and of your son's cruel death, many and many a day to come; and I'll ask God to bless both to you now and for evermore. Amen. Farewell!"

Jem had maintained a manly and dignified reserve ever since he had made his open statement of all he knew. Now both the men rose, and bowed low, looking at Mr. Carson with the deep human interest they could not fail to take in one who had endured and forgiven a deep injury; and who struggled hard, as it was evident he did, to bear up like a man under his affliction.

He bowed low in return to them. Then he suddenly

came forward and shook them by the hand ; and thus, without a word more, they parted.

There are stages in the contemplation and endurance of great sorrow, which endow men with the same earnestness and clearness of thought that in some of old took the form of Prophecy. To those who have large capability of loving and suffering, united with great power of firm endurance, there comes a time in their woe, when they are lifted out of the contemplation of their individual case into a searching inquiry into the nature of their calamity, and the remedy (if remedy there be) which may prevent its recurrence to others as well as to themselves.

Hence the beautiful, noble efforts which are from time to time brought to light, as being continuously made by those who have once hung on the cross of agony, in order that others may not suffer as they have done ; one of the grandest ends which sorrow can accomplish ; the sufferer wrestling with God's messenger until a blessing is left behind, not for one alone but for generations.

It took time before the stern nature of Mr. Carson was compelled to the recognition of this secret of comfort, and that same sternness prevented his reaping any benefit in public estimation from the actions he performed ; for the character is more easily changed, than the habits and manners originally formed by that character, and to his dying day Mr. Carson was considered hard and cold by those who only casually

saw him, or superficially knew him. But those who were admitted into his confidence were aware, that the wish which lay nearest to his heart was that none might suffer from the cause from which he had suffered ; that a perfect understanding, and complete confidence and love, might exist been masters and men ; that the truth might be recognised that the interests of one were the interests of all, and as such, required the consideration and deliberation of all ; that hence it was most desirable to have educated workers, capable of judging, not mere machines of ignorant men ; and to have them bound to their employers by the ties of respect and affection, not by mere money bargains alone ; in short, to acknowledge the Spirit of Christ as the regulating law between both parties.

Many of the improvements now in practice in the system of employment in Manchester, owe their origin to short earnest sentences spoken by Mr. Carson. Many and many yet to be carried into execution, take their birth from that stern, thoughtful mind, which submitted to be taught by suffering.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Touch us gently, gentle Time!
We've not proud or soaring wings,
Our ambition, our content,
Lies in simple things;
Humble voyagers are we
O'er life's dim unsounded sea;
Touch us gently, gentle Time!"

BARRY CORNWALL.

NOT many days after John Barton's funeral was over, all was arranged respecting Jem's appointment at Toronto; and the time was fixed for his sailing. It was to take place almost immediately: yet much remained to be done; many domestic preparations were to be made; and one great obstacle, anticipated by both Jem and Mary, to be removed. This was the opposition they expected from Mrs. Wilson, to whom the plan had never yet been named.

They were most anxious that their home should continue ever to be hers, yet they feared that her dislike to a new country might be an insuperable objection to this. At last Jem took advantage of an evening of unusual placidity, as he sat alone with his mother just before going to bed to broach the subject; and to his surprise she acceded willingly to his proposition of her accompanying himself and his wife.

"To be sure 'Merrica is a long way to flit to; beyond London a good bit I reckon; and quite in foreign parts; but I've never had no opinion of England, ever since they could be such fools as take up a quiet chap like thee, and clap thee in prison. Where you go, I'll go. Perhaps in them Indian countries they'll know a well-behaved lad when they see him; ne'er speak a word more, lad, I'll go."

Their path became daily more smooth, and easy; the present was clear and practicable, the future was hopeful; they had leisure of mind enough to turn to the past.

"Jem!" said Mary to him, one evening as they sat in the twilight, talking together in low happy voices till Margaret should come to keep Mary company through the night, "Jem! you've never yet told me how you came to know about my naughty ways with poor young Mr. Carson." She blushed for shame at the remembrance of her folly, and hid her head on his shoulder while he made answer.

"Darling, I'm almost loth to tell you; your aunt Esther told me."

"Ah, I remember! but how did she know? I was so put about that night I did not think of asking her. Where did you see her? I've forgotten where she lives."

Mary said all this in so open and innocent a manner, that Jem felt sure she knew not the truth respecting Esther, and he half hesitated to tell her. At length he replied,

"Where did you see Esther lately? When? Tell me, love, for you've never named it before, and I can't make it out."

"Oh! it was that horrible night which is like a

dream." And she told him of Esther's midnight visit, concluding with, "We must go and see her before we leave, though I don't rightly know where to find her."

"Dearest Mary,—"

"What, Jem!" exclaimed she, alarmed by his hesitation.

"Your poor Aunt Esther has no home :—she's one of them miserable creatures that walk the streets." And he in his turn told of his encounter with Esther, with so many details that Mary was forced to be convinced, although her heart rebelled against the belief.

"Jem, lad!" said she, vehemently, "we must find her out,—we must hunt her up!" she rose as if she was going on the search there and then.

"What could we do, darling?" asked he, fondly restraining her.

"Do! Why! what could we *not* do, if we could but find her? She's none so happy in her ways, think ye, but what she'd turn from them, if any one would lend her a helping hand. Don't hold me, Jem; this is just the time for such as her to be out, and who knows but what I might find her, close at hand."

"Stay, Mary, for a minute; I'll go out now and search for her if you wish, though it's but a wild chase. You must not go. It would be better to ask the police to-morrow. But if I should find her, how can I make her come with me? Once before she refused, and said she could not break off her drinking ways, come what might."

"You never will persuade her if you fear and doubt," said Mary, in tears. "Hope yourself, and trust to the good that must be in her. Speak to that,—

she has it in her yet,—oh, bring her home, and we will love her so, we'll make her good."

"Yes!" said Jem, catching Mary's sanguine spirit; "she shall go to America with us; and we'll help her to get rid of her sins. I'll go now, my precious darling, and if I can't find her, it's but trying the police to-morrow. Take care of your own sweet self, Mary," said he, fondly kissing her before he went out.

It was not to be. Jem wandered far and wide that night, but never met Esther. The next day he applied to the police; and at last they recognised under his description of her, a woman known to them under the name of the "Butterfly," from the gaiety of her dress a year or two ago. By their help he traced out one of her haunts, a low lodging-house behind Peter Street. He and his companion, a kind-hearted policeman, were admitted, suspiciously enough, by the landlady, who ushered them into a large garret where twenty or thirty people of all ages and both sexes lay and dozed away the day, choosing the evening and night for their trades of beggary, thieving, or prostitution.

"I know the Butterfly was here," said she, looking round. "She came in, the night before last, and said she had not a penny to get a place for shelter; and that if she was far away in the country she could steal aside and die in a copse, or a clough, like the wild animals; but here the police would let no one alone in the streets, and she wanted a spot to die in, in peace. It's a queer sort of peace we have here, but that night the room was uncommon empty, and I'm not a hard-hearted woman (I wish I were, I could ha' made a

good thing out of it afore this if I were harder), so I sent her up,—but she's not here now, I think."

"Was she very bad ?" asked Jem.

"Ay! nought but skin and bone, with a cough to tear her in two."

They made some inquiries, and found that in the restlessness of approaching death, she had longed to be once more in the open air, and had gone forth,—where, no one seemed to be able to tell.

Leaving many messages for her, and directions that he was to be sent for if either the policeman or the landlady obtained any clue to her where-abouts, Jem bent his steps towards Mary's house ; for he had not seen her all that long day of search. He told her of his proceedings and want of success ; and both were saddened at the recital, and sat silent for some time.

After a while they began talking over their plans. In a day or two, Mary was to give up house, and go and live for a week or so with Job Legh, until the time of her marriage, which would take place immediately before sailing ; they talked themselves back into silence and delicious reverie. Mary sat by Jem, his arm round her waist, her head on his shoulder; and thought over the scenes which had passed in that home, she was so soon to leave for ever.

Suddenly she felt Jem start, and started too without knowing why; she tried to see his countenance, but the shades of evening had deepened so much she could read no expression there. It was turned to the window ; she looked and saw a white face pressed against the panes on the outside, gazing intently into the dusky chamber.

While they watched, as if fascinated by the appearance, and unable to think or stir, a film came over the bright, feverish, glittering eyes outside, and the form sank down to the ground without a struggle of instinctive resistance.

"It is Esther!" exclaimed they, both at once. They rushed outside; and, fallen into what appeared simply a heap of white or light-coloured clothes, fainting or dead, lay the poor crushed Butterfly—the once innocent Esther.

She had come (as a wounded deer drags its heavy limbs once more to the green coolness of the lair in which it was born, there to die) to see the place familiar to her innocence, yet once again before her death. Whether she was indeed alive or dead, they knew not now.

Job came in with Margaret, for it was bed-time. He said Esther's pulse beat a little yet. They carried her upstairs and laid her on Mary's bed, not daring to undress her, lest any motion should frighten the trembling life away; but it was all in vain.

Towards midnight, she opened wide her eyes and looked around on the once familiar room: Job Legh knelt by the bed praying aloud and fervently for her, but he stopped as he saw her roused look. She sat up in bed with a sudden convulsive motion.

"Has it been a dream then?" asked she wildly. Then with a habit, which came like instinct even in that awful dying hour, her hand sought for a locket which hung concealed in her bosom, and, finding that, she knew all was true which had befallen her, since last she lay an innocent girl on that bed.

She fell back, and spoke word never more. She held

the locket containing her child's hair still in her hand, and once or twice she kissed it with a long soft kiss. She cried feebly and sadly as long as she had any strength to cry, and then she died.

They laid her in one grave with John Barton. And there they lie without name, or initial, or date. Only this verse is inscribed upon the stone which covers the remains of these two wanderers.

Psalm ciii. v. 9.—"For He will not always chide, neither will He keep his anger for ever."

I see a long low wooden house, with room enough, and to spare. The old primeval trees are felled and gone for many a mile around; one alone remains to overshadow the gable-end of the cottage. There is a garden around the dwelling, and far beyond that stretches an orchard. The glory of the Indian summer is over all, making the heart leap at the sight of its gorgeous beauty.

At the door of the house, looking towards the town, stands Mary, watching for the return of her husband from his daily work; and while she watches, she listens, smiling;

> "Clap hands, daddy comes,
> With his pocket full of plums,
> And a cake for Johnnie."

Then comes a crow of delight from Johnnie. Then his grandmother carries him to the door, and glories in seeing him resist his mother's blandishments to cling to her.

"English letters! 'Twas that made me so late!"

"Oh, Jem, Jem! don't hold them so tight! What do they say?"

"Why, some good news. Come, give a guess what it is?"

"Oh, tell me! I cannot guess," said Mary.

"Then you give it up, do you? What do you say, mother?"

Jane Wilson thought a moment.

"Will and Margaret are married?" asked she.

"Not exactly,—but very near. The old woman has twice the spirit of the young one. Come, Mary, give a guess!"

He covered his little boy's eyes with his hands for an instant, significantly, till the baby pushed them down, saying in his imperfect way,

"Tan't see."

"There now! Johnnie can see. Do you guess, Mary?"

"They've done something to Margaret to give her back her sight!" exclaimed she.

"They have. She has been couched, and can see as well as ever. She and Will are to be married on the twenty-fifth of this month, and he's bringing her out here next voyage; and Job Legh talks of coming too,—not to see you, Mary,—nor you, mother,—nor you, my little hero" (kissing him), "but to try and pick up a few specimens of Canadian insects, Will says. All the compliment is to the earwigs, you see, mother!"

"Dear Job Legh!" said Mary, softly and seriously.

THE END.

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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